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**WILLIAM P.
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All Stories Complete

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"The mills of the gods grind slowly"—and at times even the millstones are destroyed.

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"Put me on that train!" she begged. And Jeff O'Neil delivered—but not the way they planned.

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THE CALL BOX



REPORT BY THE EDITOR

WHILE your editor was on his vacation, during March, *The Call Box* for the June issue was "guested" by Mr. Raymond A. Palmer, editor-in-chief of the Ziff-Davis fiction magazines. Mr. Palmer, an iconoclast who has no peer, and who will cheerfully read a detective story if you hold a loaded pistol to his head, put on a pair of spiked shoes and jumped squarely on that genre of mystery fiction known as the "hard-boiled" thriller.

THE fact is that, while Mr. Palmer has never read a hardboiled story in his life, there was just enough truth in what he had to say to cause your regular editor (who has a soft spot in his head—change that to heart—for the "blackjack, blonde and bourbon" school of writing) some uncomfortable moments. Certainly some of the shabbiest writing of the day has been done in that field, although we are satisfied that no such story has appeared in the pages of either of our detective magazines.

BUT we do believe that, in some ways, Mr. Palmer was using the wrong set of values in his criticism. He mentioned at some length that no one has "ever heard anybody talk and act like the characters in a 'hardboiled' book." He went on to say that, in real life, you don't run into people who get sapped forty-two times; nor, he added with completely understandable wistfulness, do you meet those sleek, slender sirens loaded with sin whom you find in the pages of a Chandler novel.

AND right here, say we, is the nub of the entire debate. It is our humble opinion that readers of detective fiction aren't looking for unadorned crime cases in these pages. They want, first of all, entertainment, the thrill of the chase, and the final triumph of justice over the criminal. They want the hero to be able to talk smart and act quickly and with intelligence. They want him to have a hardbitten code of ethics and to be able to meet toughness with a still greater degree of toughness. They want him to have a skull impervious to blackjacks but not of such solid bone that an idea can't soak through. They want beautiful women involved, because nothing adds more zest to an entertaining yarn than a couple or three worldly dames. Those readers who do want factual pictures of police and private-detective work have the "True Detective" type of magazine

to select and neither MAMMOTH MYSTERY nor MAMMOTH DETECTIVE belong in that field.

IN CLOSING the subject, it seems entirely reasonable to say that the detective fiction field owes much to such men as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler—intelligent, conscientious writers who stepped in when detective fiction was becoming passé—who stepped in and brought the entire field back to favor.

THIS month's cover, we think, is going to make a lot of newsstand browsers stop in their tracks and do a double take. To make it still more effective, it is backed up by one of the best "suspense" novels we've ever presented. With "Heaven Ran Last" we honestly believe that William P. McGivern has reached the high level of craftsmanship in fiction writing that his readers and editors have been steadily predicting. It's Bill's first novel; it will not be his last. . . . What is it about? Well, it concerns a man and a woman and their attempt to build happiness on a foundation that was no stronger than their characters. It will remind a lot of readers of James M. Cain—Cain, that is, in the days when he was writing such books as "The Postman Always Rings Twice" and "Double Indemnity." Is that good enough for you?

TO YOU readers who have been asking, "What happened to Dinny Keogh?"—here's your answer. He's back again this month in a long novelette called "There's Death in the Heir." It opens with Dinny in the middle of a vacation . . . but his holiday gets tangled up with bullets and somebody else's money. By the time the excitement is over, Dinny has to go back to work to get some rest!

CLOSING the issue (four stories this month) are stories by Paul W. Fairman and the same Bill McGivern who wrote the lead novel. Paul's yarn is another of those haunting things he's an expert at—the kind of thing that leaves you thinking long after you forgot where you read it. Incidentally, don't let anything keep you from getting your mitts on a copy of the October MAMMOTH DETECTIVE; it will feature a book-length job by that same Paul Fairman. It's title is "The Glass Ladder"—and you get it ahead of book publication.

—H. B.

THE TRAIN WRECKER

A PIECE of soap and a time-table in a private museum in England are all that remains to remind the world of one of the strangest criminals of all time. For he was a professional train-wrecker, a man with no concern for the hundreds of lives he would muffle out at a single blow. Stranger still was the fact that this man had no particular grudge against the railway companies, nor did he think of robbing the bodies of the dead and injured. But he was out to smash every passenger express in England.

The case came to the attention of the English police in the year 1898. Toward the end of that year, a series of train accidents caused the railway companies to wonder if these accidents were not actually planned murders. Offers of rewards were made by three of the largest companies for any information leading to the capture of the train-wrecking fiends. They did not know that it was the diabolical work of a single man.

Still the wrecks continued. One of them occurred on the Midland Railway, near Wellingborough, when the express from St. Pancras to Manchester rammed into a crowbar that was stuck up on the rails with the point towards the direction from which the train would come. The situation became so desperate that everyone was afraid to ride the trains.

The vicious criminal might never have been discovered if he had not indulged in one of the most fatal errors of the rogues of the world, boasting. One day, two workmen got into conversation with a stranger in a public-house at North-

ampton. The mysterious train wreck was on the lips of every Britisher at that time, so naturally the conversation turned in this direction. The workers shook their heads sadly, wondering where the train-wreckers would strike next. To their astonishment, the strangers said, they would soon hear of another case and it would take place near Bedford.

As soon as the stranger had left, the workmen hurried to the police. They gave a full description of the man together with the information they had received. Within a few hours, the police began a house-to-house search for the mysterious stranger in Bedford. They hoped that he might be their link to the rest of the gang. Finally, in a small rooming-house, they found the man that fit the description perfectly. In his pocket, they found a time-table listing all the trains in that part of the country and a piece of soap with some iron particles still clinging to it. He had been washing iron-dust from his hands. These were particles of the same material that had caused the amazing network of wrecks.

Who was the train-wrecker? All that we know is that he called himself Tomlinson, though his real name was Smith. Why did he plan these mass murders? Unfortunately, there were no psychiatric investigations in those days. Maybe he just wanted to see what an accident looked like. Maybe he was terrified of speed and wanted to destroy it. All that we know is that the people of England sighed with relief when the mystery was solved.—*Sandy Miller*

PRIVATE DETECTIVE: HOLLYWOOD STYLE

THEY just don't come that way, almost any private detective will admit; and he has a great deal of difficulty convincing prospective clients of that fact. A Hollywood detective couldn't last more than a few hours in real life; he'd be locked up for housebreaking or murdered by the characters he chums around with. Most private detectives are baffled by the vocabulary Hollywood movie directors place in the mouths of their supposed counterparts.

Charles Ott, who must have been a private detective a good many years to handle between 3100 and 4000 cases, claims that he has never been shot at, has never found a dead body lying around while he was at work, has never been beaten up by gangsters, thugs, and hoodlums, and has never frisked anyone or been frisked. And to explode a very common fiction, he insists that though he has a permit to carry a gun, he hasn't done so for the past 3 or 4 years. He doesn't drink and won't hire an operative who can't handle his liquor. Contrary to popular belief, most private detectives do not have cute blond wise-cracking secretaries. Most private detectives have no secretaries at all.

Just what is a private detective hired to do? According to Ott, he seldom tangles with gangs. Much of his work must sound very dull and uninteresting to people accustomed to seeing Hollywood's version. Sometimes he acts as a bodyguard to spoiled rich children. Sometimes a detective is installed on a business force to track down embezzlers. In this case the detective works for a store or industrial plant to see to it that no employee knocks down on the company or goes home at night loaded with stolen goods. Ott has smoked out chain store managers who filled packing cases with merchandise and had them delivered to friends, after which they disposed of their loot elsewhere.

Ott does shadowing to compile evidence necessary for divorce proceedings and character investigations. Then there is process serving and skip tracing. When there are many cases to handle, Ott hires operatives to work with him. A shadowing case needs three or four men. At various stages in his career, Ott has hired as many as thirty men. Fees are high and business is good. But—is it dangerous? You won't find an "eye" who will admit it.—*Arn Rich*

HEAVEN RAN LAST

by
**WILLIAM P.
McGIVERN**



It was left for me to take up
the job another man's anger had ruined



**The powerful story of a man and a
woman who built their hope of heaven on murder**

I SAW him when he got off the train. He was just as big as I remembered him, with thick Irish features, and that made him easy to spot. He was bent a little under the weight of his duffel bag and he looked uncomfortable in the heavy uniform.

I worked my way through the crowd

and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Welcome home, hero," I said. I gave him a big grin that probably seemed on the level.

He eyed me for a second and then he smiled, a slow, easy smile of recognition.

"Well, Johnny, this is swell. It's swell

to see you."

I pulled him away from the mob coming off the train and he put the duffel bag down, and began to look around. He was looking for someone and I know who he was looking for.

"Is Alice here?" he said. "Did she come down with you, Johnny?"

"You'll have to wait about another half hour to see her," I said. She didn't want to meet you in a crowd so she called me this morning and asked me to pick you up. You know how a woman is."

"Well," he said, smiling again in his slow, soft way, "it was swell of you to go to the trouble."

"What do you mean? I was glad to do it. Now grab that bag and come along. I know you want to see that little wife of yours."

"I sure do," he said, very simply.

We didn't do any more talking on the way through the station. I was wondering what he was thinking. He didn't know me very well. I had met him a few times before he went into the army. He used to stop in to put down a bet or two when I had my place out North. I knew his wife better. I met her after he left, and after I got to know her real well, I told her to mention me every now and then in her letters. Just casual stuff, so if somebody saw us together and wrote him about it she could cover up.

He whistled when he saw the car, a Packard with red leather upholstery and a lot of fancy chrome gadgets. He put his duffel bag in back and got in front with me.

"This is class," he said. "Things must be going good with you."

"You know me. I like things that cost money."

I drove over to Madison street, turned left and went down to Michigan. I swung left there and got in the outer

lane so I could get over to the Drive at the Drake Hotel. Alice lived on Winthrop avenue, about sixty hundred north, and the Drive would get us there in twenty minutes.

We didn't talk much until we passed the Drake. He was looking at the buildings and the lake and the crowds of people.

"It all looks the same," he said finally. "Funny, but you get to thinking you won't recognize things when you get back. You worry about the people, too."

"They never change," I said.

"I guess you're right." He turned a little on the seat and looked at me. "They don't change if you're with them because you're both changing, I guess, and you don't notice it because it happens slow. But after not seeing a person for three years . . ."

HE DIDN'T finish it. The words just trailed off and he looked out at the lake with a kind of strange look on his face. I knew he was thinking about Alice.

"Three years is quite a stretch," I said. "How was it? Pretty tough?"

His eyes came around to me. "It wasn't much fun. The worst thing is the feeling you're slipping away from everybody you knew at home." He frowned a little. "That isn't just what I mean but it's hard to put into words."

"Yeah, I know what you mean," I said.

"I should have got home eight or ten months ago," he said. "My outfit left just before Christmas in forty-five, but I got stuck as a witness for those war trials. That's what held me up. Those last months were really the worst because there didn't seem to be any reason for being over there any more, and I knew Alice was having a tough time waiting for me to get back." He looked

at me then, like he was a little embarrassed. "You know, Johnny, I want to thank you for showing Alice a good time while I was away. She wrote me about the times you took her swimming and things like that."

"Ah, cut it out," I said. "That was a break for me. She's a swell kid. Anyway she paid me back by saving my neck a couple of times. Every time I'd figure on getting married I'd bring the girl over for Alice to take a look at. And she always gave me the straight dope. Those babes can fool you and me, but they don't fool her."

He laughed at that. "Yeah, she's plenty sharp about things like that. I guess it's because she's so straight herself she can see through the wrong kind."

"Sure," I said.

We didn't talk any more until I turned off Sheridan at Granville. When I started down Winthrop he said suddenly, "Johnny, you may think I'm nuts but I'd like you to come up with me for a while." He looked at me anxiously. "You know how it is. I haven't seen her for a long time and it'd be easier if someone was around."

"Don't be crazy," I said. "You kids want to be alone. You don't want a broken-down bookie hanging around."

"I wish you would," he said. "I don't know, I guess I'm kind of nervous."

You slob, I thought. You stupid, damn slob.

"Well," I said, "I'll go and buy a couple bottles of beer and come back for a little while. But you should see her alone first."

"I guess that's best," he said.

I pulled up in front of the place where Alice lived. It was a four-story, brown-brick walkup that some smart operator had made into two-room kitchenette apartments. Alice's front room faced the street on the second floor.

He got his duffel bag out and said, "Well, I'll be seeing you in a little while, right?"

"Yeah, I'll be back with the beer pretty soon."

I put the car in gear and got out of there fast. There was a bar about three blocks away and I went in there and told the bartender I wanted a beer and three quart bottles to go.

The bartender was middle-aged, with a pink bald head beaded with sweat. He nodded and drew me a beer and then bent over with a grunt to get the bottles out of the ice box.

I sat there and sipped my beer, trying to get my mind off what was going on back there in her apartment. But I couldn't think of anything else.

I could see him running up the steps, like a guy in a magazine story, and swinging her up in his arms to show her he was husky and strong and full of juice. Then he'd carry her into the little front room and kiss her a dozen times and run his hands over her and tell her how wonderful she was and how glad he was to be home.

I wondered how she'd take that big Irish guy with the husky shoulders and heavy hands.

I knew what hands did to her. She'd probably suck in her stomach and push herself closer to him and wriggle.

I WAS holding the glass so tight my knuckles were white. I felt mean. I wanted the bartender to say something, anything, so I could let him have it right in the face. But he just stood there, his back to the cash register, looking out at the street.

I put a bill on the bar, picked up the bottles of beer and went out into the hot sunlight. My shirt was sticking to my back by the time I got behind the wheel. Some kids were playing in the street, and the sidewalks were crowded

with tired looking women in wash dresses, with damp stringy hair and bare legs. Most of them were carrying brown paper bags full of groceries.

I drove back down Winthrop and parked across the street from her place. I put the bottles of beer under my arm and went inside the cool, tiled vestibule.

My fingers hit Alice's bell automatically. I didn't have to look. The buzzer sounded after a moment and I opened the door and went up to the second floor.

She was standing in the doorway with an odd expression on her face. From inside the apartment I could hear a shower running.

"Well, where's the hero?" I asked her. "I got him a nice cold bottle of beer." My voice was a little louder than it had to be; I didn't know if he was listening.

"He's cleaning up," she said. Her voice was a little loud, too. "He said he wouldn't feel right until he got out of that uniform and into some civilian clothes."

I went past her into the front room and she closed the door and stood with her back to it, watching me with the same funny look.

"Well, I don't blame him," I said. "He looks pretty good, doesn't he?"

She left the door and came toward me slowly. Her eyes looked dark and big. Everything about her looked drawn up tight.

"He's lost a little weight, I think," she said.

"Yeah, I guess he did."

"He said he couldn't eat at all on the boat."

We were watching each other now and the things we said were just noises that didn't mean anything. She kept coming closer until she could put her hand out and touched my arm.

"Johnny—"

I slapped her hand away. "I'd better fix him a glass of beer," I said.

She looked at me steadily and the color began to come up in her face. "I guess you'd better."

I went into the little kitchen and put the bottles on the table. I got an opener out of the drawer and when I turned around she was standing in the doorway.

"I'll get the glasses," she said.

I opened one of the bottles and she got glasses from the pantry and put them on the table. I picked up one and filled it slowly.

She was standing close, almost touching me, and her eyes were on mine, wide and shiny.

"Johnny, I can't do it," she said, and her voice was a whisper. "I want you, Johnny."

"For God's sake, shut up," I said. I kept my voice down but the way I said it brought another patch of color to her face.

"Don't talk to me that way, Johnny."

My hand was shaking and some of the beer slopped over the edge of the glass and ran down over my fingers. It made me cold all over. I put the glass down and looked at her.

WE WERE a few inches apart, staring at each other, our arms at our sides. I could hear my breath and I could hear my heart pumping heavily.

"Johnny," she whispered. She raised one hand and touched my arm.

My arms went around her and I held her so tight I could hear her straining to breathe. She pressed closer to me and said, "Johnny," in such a soft voice that I didn't hear the word, just her breath against my ear.

I don't know how long we were like that before I shoved her away and picked up another glass. She stood twisting her hands together and look-

ing like she might cry.

"Johnny, it's got to be you. I can't stand it with him."

My hands were shaking so I had to put the glass down. "He's back," I said. "We knew he was coming back. We knew how this was going to end. I'm out."

"No, Johnny—"

"Will you shut up?"

She backed away from me a little and her hands came up slowly until they were touching her breasts. We stood there, not saying anything, just staring at each other, until I heard the shower stop and the bathroom door open.

"Where's everybody?" I heard him call out.

"Right out here getting that beer ready," I yelled.

"That sounds good. Where's Alice?"

I picked up the bottle of beer again and looked at Alice until she turned and went back into the living room.

I filled two more glasses and put them on a tray. When my hands stopped shaking I went into the front room. He was sitting in one of the chairs and he was wearing just a pair of slacks. He was built like a coal heaver. Thick arms and shoulders and there was a mat of red hair on his chest. He put a big grin on his face when he saw the beer.

"This is the life," he said.

Alice was standing beside him and he reached up and took hold of her wrist. "Sit down on Pappa's lap and be comfortable," he said.

"It's hot, Frank. 'I'll sit over on the sofa."

"No, you won't." He laughed. "I'm not going to let you get that far away from me for a long time."

He caught her around the waist with his other arm and pulled her onto his lap. She struggled a little but he held her arms tight and put his chin into

her shoulder and worked it around until she began to squirm and giggle.

"I guess I'll have to start showing you who's boss again," he said. "Maybe you've forgotten what it's like to have a man around the house."

"Frank, don't!"

He laughed as she continued to twist around in his arms. He put his hand on her knee and squeezed it lightly.

I saw his expression change then and the color coming up in his face. When he saw me watching he grinned a little, embarrassed.

"I guess we're forgetting Johnny with the beer," he said. "But a guy doesn't come home to his wife every day." He laughed and took his hand away from her knee a little self-consciously. "I'll take that beer now."

I gave him a glass as carefully as I could, but some of it spilled. I couldn't help it.

"Watch it, boy." He grinned. "I just had my bath."

I tried to smile. "A little nervous, I guess."

"You look kind of pale at that," he said. "Like you might be getting a little sick. You got to watch yourself in this weather."

I put the tray down carefully. I felt like I was coming apart inside. Seeing her there, lying back against his bare chest, with his hands touching her familiarly, was what did it.

"I've got to be going," I said.

Alice didn't say a word. Her lips were parted and the expression on her face didn't tell me anything.

Frank said, "Well, we haven't been very polite, I guess, but you know how it is, Johnny." He grinned and put his hand back on her knee.

"Yeah," I said. "I know how it is."

There was a chance there for a crack, a nasty crack that would have

hurt her. But he might have tumbled to something. I didn't feel like hurting her or making cracks.

I waved to them and went out of the door and down the steps as fast as I could.

CHAPTER II

I SPENT the next two days in my room. I used up a couple bottles of rye and I must have passed out completely two or three times. None of it helped.

I couldn't get her out of my mind. I knew things between us weren't over and never would be.

The night of the second day, I quit drinking. I felt sick and dirty and weak. My room had a stale hot smell and there was the coppery taste of whisky in my mouth. I pushed up on one elbow, switched on the bed lamp and looked around. There were two empty bottles on the floor, my clothes were in a pile and there was sweat on my bare chest.

It was a hot night and the wind coming in the window was suffocating. I was a million miles from anybody, shut away in a dirty hotel room and ready to come apart because of one woman who was gone from me forever.

That was the way I was feeling. I snapped off the light and stretched out again on my back. The darkness and heat came in on me, crowding close until I felt I wouldn't be able to breathe again.

Thoughts came crowding in on me, too. I tried to push them away, but I was remembering the night I'd met her and it all came back like it happened yesterday instead of three years ago . . .

I was feeling good that night. I had a little book then, on Sheridan Road, out North, and things were breaking

pretty good. I was sitting in a bar out that way when I saw her come in. This was ten o'clock, the middle of the week, and there wasn't much of a crowd.

The bar was one of those places with red leather booths, a lot of fancy chromium trimmings and the waiters in tuxedos. A place that tried to be a supper club and missed by a country mile.

She came in and sat down on one of the bar stools and ordered a drink. Then she went through a little business of checking her watch with the one over the bar, like she was waiting for somebody.

I liked what I could see of her. She was tall and had good legs. Her hair was long and dark and it went well with her white skin and soft, full lips.

I watched her while I sipped my drink. She glanced at her watch again after a few minutes, and then she looked down the bar to where I was sitting but it didn't mean anything. She just flicked me with a glance and went back to her drink.

I waited for her to look my way again but she didn't, so I got up and walked over to where she was sitting. I stopped about a stool away and told the bartender I wanted cigarettes. When he tossed them on the bar I opened them up and started fumbling for a match. I fumbled around in my pockets until she looked at me.

I grinned at her and said, "Just fresh out, I guess. Can you help me out?"

There was a pack of matches on the bar in front of her and she shoved them down toward me without saying anything. I lit one and when it flared up I could see her eyes, big and deep and the kind of blue that looks almost black.

"Thanks," I said. I held the cig-

arettes out to her. "Have one?"

"No, thanks. I just put one out."

"Well, I've got to do something for you." I waved to the bartender. "Eddie, give the lady a drink and build one for me while you're at it."

"I really don't want a drink," she said. It sounded like she was beginning to get mad. "I can buy my own when I do."

"Sure you can," I said. "But I was just being friendly. No law against that, is there?"

She didn't say anything to that and pretty soon Eddie came over with the drinks. She looked at hers for a minute like she didn't know what to do, and then she shrugged.

"All right. Thanks."

"That's the spirit. Mind if I sit here for a while?"

"No law against that, either," she said, and smiled a little.

I figured this would be a cinch. I sat down and pulled the stool a little closer, but when I tried to take her hand she pulled it away quick.

"Take it easy," she said. "I think you've made a mistake about me. The drink is all right and you sit here all night if you want to, but that's all there is to it. Do you understand what I mean?"

I DECIDED I was going too fast, but that's the way I am and it's the way I like to do everything. But she was getting under my skin and I made up my mind she was worth slowing down for.

She had on a white dress and not much under it. Her legs were bare and she had them crossed so I could see the long smooth muscles in her calves. I liked the clean shiny look of her hair and I liked the way her lips stuck out a little, soft and thick and smooth. Her features weren't

regular, they weren't like a doll's, but the way they were put together made her face look interesting. It was funny. She looked nice, like she might have a job as a secretary or something, but there was something else underneath that to make you think of things that were tough and mean and wild. And I wanted to know that part of her.

"I'm sorry," I said. I tried to look like I meant it, but it's hard for me to look like anything but what I am. "You must think I'm just hanging around here waiting for a pick-up. Well, that's not it. I was just lonely and I wanted somebody to talk to. That's all."

She eyed me steadily, and she didn't seem angry any more, but she looked plenty cool and sure of herself.

"All right. Let's leave it right here, then."

We talked for a while about things that didn't mean anything at all but she wasn't paying much attention to me or what we were talking about. She just stared at her drink and said yes or no every now and then. There was something on her mind. She began to look angry again, like something was building up inside her.

Finally she looked straight at me and said, "You thought I came in looking for something, didn't you?"

I shrugged. "Maybe I did. There's no reason to get sore about it. You're a swell looking dish and you came in alone. A girl who comes in alone to a place like this and sits at the bar is generally looking for somebody or anybody. You can't blame me for figuring you wrong.

"There are a lot of girls alone these days," she said. "I'm one of them. My husband left for overseas last week, and I haven't seen him for the last year, except for a few furloughs. I can either sit home in my apartment

and read a magazine every night of the week, or go out alone and have a drink. That's why I'm alone, not because I'm looking for anything."

"You don't have to be alone. There's still a few guys left around."

"You're making the most of it, too, aren't you?" She smiled a little, but there wasn't any humor in the smile. "You look healthy enough; why aren't you in the army?"

"They don't want me," I said. I was mad enough myself, now, to hit her across those smooth full lips of hers, but I tried a gag to cover up how much she was bothering me. "They said to come back if there's an invasion. The doc who looked me over said if they started taking guys like me he'd sell his war bonds."

She didn't smile. "And you think every girl who's alone is just waiting for you to come around and keep her company, don't you? What makes you think a girl would want you if the army doesn't?"

That was just talk. I didn't mind the army cracks. I was out and I wanted to stay out and to hell with playing soldier, but she was so tough and mean under that polite skin of hers that it made me boil. I wanted to know all about that toughness and meanness.

I said, "I'm sorry if I offended you." I sounded like I meant it. I went into an act then, but I didn't ham it up. I just looked serious and talked kind of quiet. "I don't blame you for feeling the way you do. It must burn you up to see a young guy like me walking around, while your husband's gone and everything, but they don't want me and that's all there is to it. Do you think it's fun being looked at by mothers with kids over ther®, or being called 4-F by every girl you meet. Well, you can have it."

WE WERE quiet for a minute or two, looking at our drinks, and I kept the serious look on my face, until finally she looked over at me and said, "Well, don't let it get you down. Maybe I was pretty hard on you. I'm sorry, but you made me angry."

"Well, can't I square it some way?"

"It doesn't matter, but thanks. I've got to be getting home anyway."

"Maybe I could give you a lift?"

She looked down at her glass and then she shrugged her shoulders a little and smiled. She looked back at me and said, "There isn't any law against that either, I guess."

"Fine," I said. "Do you feel like another drink?"

"No, I've really got to be going."

I picked up my change and the cigarettes and we went outside. It was warm and the air had a soft feel to it. It was a pretty night, with a clear sky and lots of stars.

We walked along the sidewalk without saying anything until we came to my car. I didn't have the Packard then, but it was a pretty nice car, an Oldsmobile, a forty-two.

We got in and I put the windows down and turned on the radio. Freddy Martin came in, nice and soft, playing *As Time Goes By*.

"That's one of my favorites," she said. She pushed her hair back and began to hum the tune under her breath.

"Mine too," I said. "How about a drive to cool off before I take you home?"

She hummed a little more and then she looked over at me with a twisted smile. "All right, but not too long."

I went north, on Sheridan, all the way to Glencoe. She hummed the songs that came in on the radio, and her voice was nice, kind of husky and low but the pitch was good.

There was a breeze coming in from the lake and it had that cool clean sea smell. We went out to where there were trees beside the road and it was nice driving along through the dark, listening to her sing and feeling the breeze on my face. She seemed quiet and relaxed now, and it made her look prettier, almost like a kid, but I liked her the other way better.

Finally she said, "I think we'd better go back. I have to be up early in the morning."

I didn't argue with her. I just said, "Okay," and turned the car around and started back. I drove slow and it was about twelve when I pulled up in front of her apartment on Winthrop avenue. I cut the motor and switched the lights off and the darkness and quiet came crowding into the car.

We didn't say anything for a while and then I looked over at her. She was looking straight ahead and sitting perfectly still.

"Cigarette?" I said.

She nodded and I gave her one. I lit a match and held it for her and then I lit my own. We just sat there, smoking, and something started building between us in the warm darkness.

"I've got to be up early in the morning," she said, and her voice was too natural. "Seven-thirty."

"That is early. "What time do you have to be down town?"

"By nine."

"Who do you work for?"

"Tone and Smith. That's an insurance agency. The main office is in New York."

"Must be a pretty big outfit."

"Yes, it is."

Just words. They didn't mean anything. We weren't thinking about anything except the thing we were feeling. My mouth was dry and the cigarette tasted like something to be thrown

away. I tossed it out the window.

"Do you live alone here?"

"Yes. It's just a two-room apartment. I like being alone. I could get a girl to share expenses with me, but I wouldn't like having someone around in the morning. There's enough for me to do taking care of myself, without having some girl borrowing my stockings and getting in my way. In the morning I make the orange juice and put the coffee on before I take my shower. Then I have breakfast and dress in time to catch the eight-fifteen bus." She laughed a little. "It's like living on a time-table."

"Do you mind being alone at night?" I said.

She didn't answer that and we sat there while the silence and tension kept building.

"I'd better go up," she said finally, but she made no move to get out.

"How about a night cap? Anything to drink upstairs?"

"It's pretty late. There's nothing but gin anyway."

"Gin's fine."

"I've really got to go."

"Okay." I looked at her. "Good night."

"Good night," she said. She didn't move. Then she looked over at me and her eyes were wide and shiny. "You might give me a ring sometime."

"We'd better leave it at good night," I said.

We sat there a little while longer and she was waiting for me to say something else, but I kept looking straight ahead.

Finally she said in a low voice, "Are you sure you don't mind gin?"

That was how it started.

I stayed with her that night and from then on there wasn't anything else for me—

I SAT up on the edge of the bed and snapped the light on again. I was crying then and I was sick and cold and I guess I must have been half crazy, because I picked up the phone and called her number. I had to talk to her, that was all I knew.

I heard the phone buzz a few times and then I heard his voice.

"Hello," he said.

"Is Alice there?"

"Yeah, she's here. Who's this?"

I came to then. I put the receiver back fast and sat there shaking, wondering if he'd recognized my voice. I knew I'd done a crazy thing. What would he think of me calling his wife in the middle of the night? He might go in to her and start yelling about it and she might get hot and start talking.

I laid down and tried to get myself under control. I had to get straightened out before I did something crazy again that would tip him off about what had been going on between Alice and me while he was away.

She told me one night about his temper and how strong he was. If he ever suspected anything he'd go out of his head, I knew.

I'd known him a little bit before I met her. We used to talk about what a funny coincidence that was. We were staying at a little cabin up in northern Wisconsin one night, lying in bed under about six comforters when something she said clicked in my mind.

"Frank Olsen? A guy by that name used to come into my place. Was this husband of yours a big red-head?"

"That's him. It's odd that you should know him, isn't it? He used to play the horses occasionally."

"Yeah, a two-dollar bettor. How'd you come to marry him?"

"I don't know. I was twenty then. He had a good job and he was very much in love with me. I was curious, I

guess. I was willing to go to a hotel with him, but that shocked him. He wanted it done legally, so we got married."

"Do you love him now?"

"I never loved him. Oh, Johnny," she said, and her voice was ragged. She twisted around in my arm and I kissed her, and we forgot all about him, and we never talked about him very much after that night.

My phone buzzed then and I pick it up, feeling suddenly scared.

It was the switchboard operator. "Did you get that number all right, Mr. Ford?"

"I got it," I said. I knew she'd been listening and she must have thought it funny that I hung up without talking.

"I just wanted to make sure," she said.

I hung up and went into the bathroom and switched on the light over the mirror. I looked like hell. I knew I ought to shave and take a shower and then go down and get the late race results and see how much money I'd need the next day to cover the bets I'd taken, but I didn't feel like doing anything.

I turned off the light and went back and flopped on the bed.

The phone rang again a little later. I picked it up and put it to my ear.

"Johnny?"

I rose up on one elbow and my hands were shaking.

"Alice, is that you? Where are you, baby?"

"Yes, it's me. Johnny, did you call the apartment a little while ago?"

"I had to talk to you, baby. Where are you?"

"I'm at the drug store. I told Frank I was going to get some ice cream. God, Johnny, don't ever do that again."

"I've got to see you." My voice was shaking like my hands and I was almost crying. "Do you hear, baby? I got to

see you."

"Oh, Johnny, I want to see you. I can't stand this much longer. I can't bear him. I want you. What are we going to do, Johnny?"

"Can you come down now?"

"He's waiting for me; I can't. Tomorrow night I'll tell him I'm staying down to work. I can see you then, but not for long."

"What time?"

"Right after work. About six."

"Alice, I love you, baby. When I think of you with him I go crazy. I can't work, or eat or anything."

"I love you, Johnny," she said, but the words were muffled and I could hear her crying.

"Taking it easy, baby. Better get home with the ice cream now, before he gets suspicious. I'll be waiting for you tomorrow night."

"I don't want to go home. I want to be with you, Johnny."

"Tomorrow night," I said.

"All right, Johnny."

She hung up and I went back into the bathroom and snapped on the light, I didn't look any better than before, but I felt able to do something about it now. I shaved, took a long shower and brushed my teeth a few times. After that I put on clean underwear, a new glen plaid suit and a starched shirt with the kind of long pointed collar I liked. With black-and-white sport shoes and blue, polka-dot tie I looked pretty good. I combed my hair and splashed some after-shave-lotion on my face.

I looked at myself in the mirror and I was pretty sharp. I felt a lot better, too, and I wondered for a minute if that was because I knew she was having a tough time of it, too.

I was hungry and I knew I could eat, so I snapped out the lights and went downstairs to get a steak and pick up the race results.

CHAPTER III

THE next morning I woke up late, around noon, and ordered breakfast sent up to my room. I had some work to do and I was up to getting at it, so I took a quick shower. By the time I finished shaving, the bell hop was setting up my breakfast on a table in front of the window.

I put on a robe and slippers and sat down. The bell hop stood around and grinned at me while I started eating. He was a young, blond kid with eyes like blue marbles and a clean-looking skin. He thought I was pretty hot stuff, I guess, because I knew a lot of sport writers and politicians and slept late in the morning and had my breakfast in my room.

I pointed a fork at the dresser where there was some change.

"Pick yourself out half a buck," I told him, "but don't buy one of them FHA homes with it. They're a bum investment."

He grinned at that and went over to the dresser. He came back tossing the half buck up and down in his hand and still grinning.

He said, "You got anything hot for today, Mr. Ford?"

"Don't get in my hair, Junior," I said. "If I knew which of them crazy horses was going to win I'd play 'em myself. Then after about a month, I pick up my million bucks and go live in Miami."

"Aw, you know which ones are going to win."

I buttered some toast and grinned. He was a pretty smart kid.

"All right, put that half I gave you on Blue Angel in the Fourth at Pimlico. He's a cinch unless he breaks a leg. And even if he breaks a leg he'll be in the money."

"Gee, thanks, Mr. Ford."

"All right, now let me finish this food in peace, Junior."

He grinned and went out, looking happy. I ate the breakfast and looked through the race news. The food was right and I felt clean and comfortable.

Out of curiosity I looked up Blue Angel. He was ten to one, and I didn't know anything about him, but he had a chance. He had four legs and none of the others had more. He might win and then Junior would think I was a hell of a sharp guy. If he didn't, what difference would it make?

I finished a second cup of coffee and then lit a cigarette and drew the smoke deep into my lungs. I felt good and I knew it was because I was going to see Alice at six o'clock. I didn't think what it would be like when she left me to go back to him, but I knew without thinking that the hell would start all over again. I just pushed that thought out of my head. She'd be here and that's what counted.

I got up from the table and went over to the desk I used for my work. I had two phones there, one to the wire service that gave fast news from the track and the other to the syndicate's exchange where I laid off bets that were too big for me to handle.

I was a phone bookie and I liked it a lot better than when I had my own joint out North. I had a book then in back of a cigar store and I had to be there all the time, keep up the scratch sheets and listen to a lot of mugs that stood around and blew cigar smoke in my face all day.

After I got a pretty good bunch of customers lined up I quit the joint, moved here to the hotel and handled all my business by phone. It was simple. A guy I knew would call up, give me his bets, and that's all there was to it.

I was in with the syndicate, like everybody else, because, like everybody

else, I had to be. Trying to run a book without being in with the syndicate would be like trying to swim with an anchor around your neck. You'd get just as far and wind up the same way in both cases.

They took a percentage of my bets but I used their exchange to lay off the big money I couldn't handle, and they bought me the heavy protection, like judges, police captains, and the other big shots.

The hotel was in the Loop, a pretty nice joint, and it set me back a lot because I had to pay off the manager, the house detective and a few cops, but I didn't mind. I didn't have to see a lot of mugs, the hours were good and so was the money.

I WENT over my bets for the last few days, figured out who I owed money to, and put the cash in envelopes with the names on the outside. I sealed the envelopes and put them in a little pile, and when I went out for dinner I'd leave them in my box so the lucky guys could pick them up.

I didn't have much new stuff because I'd been out of circulation for the last few days and that wasn't so good. A guy wants to bet on a horse when he feels like it and if one bookie isn't around he'll try another.

So I went over to the outside phone and called some of the customers I was sure had been trying to get me the last couple of days. I told them I'd been out of town and fixed things up as well as I could.

Those six calls gave me four bets. Three of them were on favorites, pretty good bets, but the last was big, five hundred bucks on a twenty to one shot.

That was the kind of bet I had to lay off to the syndicate. I couldn't afford to hold all of it and risk getting clipped for a ten thousand dollar payoff. I just

didn't have that kind of money. I called the syndicate's wire and gave them the whole bet. They'd lay it off around the country in small amounts, so that if the horse come in nobody would take a bad beating.

I worked the rest of the afternoon making up for the two days I'd been out, getting my figures straightened out and taking a few more bets on the phone.

Around five I laid off and took a long shower and shaved. I used plenty of after-shave-lotion and powder and then I put on a pair of gabardine slacks and a silk sport shirt. That was about five-thirty, so I sat down and looked through the papers. I couldn't keep my mind on the print so I poured a double shot of bourbon, put in about an inch of ice and stretched out on the bed.

The liquor gave me a nice warm feeling. I laid there and thought about Alice. She'd be along in less than half an hour.

I felt swell right then. I'd worked all the day, I had a drink in my hand, there was money in the bank and Alice was coming.

At six o'clock I wondered what was keeping her and suddenly I knew that if she didn't show I was going to be in bad shape. The money in the bank, the drink in my hand—neither meant a damn thing. Alice was all that mattered.

By the time I finished the drink I was starting to sweat. She would call if she couldn't make it and I started praying the phone wouldn't ring.

At six-fifteen there was a knock on the door. I crossed over and jerked it open fast. She was standing there in a white dress, looking hot and tired.

She came into the room and I closed the door and then we stood looking at each other for a minute without saying anything. She looked a little scared.

"Funny," she said, with a crooked

smile, "it seems sort of wrong now, doesn't it?"

"Is that the way you feel?"

She came closer to me and she didn't look scared any more. She put her hand on my shoulder and leaned against me. "No, Johnny, that's not the way I feel. I feel like I'm coming home after being away a long time."

I sat down in the big chair and pulled her onto my lap.

"That's my baby. You look tired. Was it a tough day?"

"Not so bad. But hot."

"How about a drink?"

"Not right now, Johnny." She leaned back against me and I could feel the heat of her body through the silk shirt I was wearing. She closed her eyes and said, "I just want to sit here for a while Johnny. I don't even want to think."

"Suits me, baby," I said. I pulled her head down closer to me and kissed her hair and her ear and the tip of her nose. Soft little kisses the way you'd kiss a baby. The room was almost dark and it seemed perfect just to sit there holding her and kissing her a little.

Finally she stirred and raised herself so she could look at me. She was smiling. "Hello, Johnny."

"Hello, baby."

SHE leaned forward and kissed me on the lips, softly at first and then she pressed closer to me and my arms went around her as tight as I could make them.

We didn't talk any more. I picked her up and carried her to the bed.

She kept saying my name over and over, and then she began to cry a little and her head was rolling from side to side.

"Johnny, I've got to have you. I can't stand things this way."

"It's going to be all right, baby."

"Promise me, Johnny. Promise me."

"I promise, baby."

She stopped rolling her head and looked at me for a moment with her dark shiny eyes and then she began to laugh, a soft little laugh.

"You promised, didn't you, Johnny?"

There was never anything in the world like that afternoon.

Afterward we just lay there and smoked cigarettes and watched the little glow they made in the darkness of the room.

She got up on her elbow after a while and put her cigarette out. Then she ran her hand slowly over my chest and shoulders.

"I'm hungry," she said.

"I'll send down for some stuff," I said.

"You've got such a nice skin, Johnny. Almost like a girl's." She laughed and lay down beside me again and began humming to herself, some song we'd listened to together on the radio.

". . . When do you have to go?"

She stopped humming and was quiet for a long time it seemed. "He's going to be furious anyway so it doesn't make too much difference. I told him I had some work to do for Mr. Lesser this evening, but he didn't like the idea. I'd better leave about nine."

"Make it ten, baby."

"All right." She looked at me and smiled. "An hour won't make any difference to him but it might to us. Funny thing, Mr. Lesser did want me to work tonight." She laughed. "When I'm old and nobody wants me I think I'll have to fall back on him."

"Is that old goat still bothering you?"

"He's not that old," she said. "He never really bothers me, you know that. He just hangs around and lets me know that he's willing to liven up my life any time I feel in the mood."

"Does he know Frank is back?"

"I forgot to tell him, but I will tomorrow. I don't want him calling me now. Frank is angry enough as it is without having Mr. Lesser carrying on an affair with me by phone."

Lesser was Alice's boss. He was about forty, a bachelor, one of those sharp dressing little guys who like to imagine they're lady killers. He'd had a yen for Alice ever since she'd worked there, but it had never gotten him anything that took more than a pair of eyes to handle.

He used to call her every week or so and suggest that he come out for a drink. Probably he thought it was very romantic and glamorous just the way it was; if she'd said yes it might have scared him to death.

"I'd better get some food up here," I said. I called room service and told them to send up the special dinner for two. Onion soup, shrimp cocktails, sirloins done rare and all the trimmings.

"That sounds wonderful," she said. "How long will it take to get all that ready?" She turned her head and looked at me and her eyes were shining in the dark.

"About forty-five minutes. There's lots of time."

She turned on her side and stretched her legs slowly and then she made a funny little noise in her throat.

"I love you, Johnny," she whispered.

We didn't do any more talking. When I heard the knock on the door I got up and took a dollar from my wallet. I put my robe on and went to the door. A bell hop was standing in the hall behind one of those tables on wheels and there must have been a dozen dishes with silver lids on top of the tray.

I gave the boy the buck and pulled the thing into the room and closed the door. Alice sat up in bed and said, "I'm starved. Everything smells too good to be true."

I PUSHED the thing over to the side of the bed and sat down on the edge of the mattress.

"Shall I turn the light on?" she asked.

I took the silver lids off the food and put them out of the way on the floor.

"We don't need any light," I said.

"We might eat the steak first and the salad last," she said.

"What's wrong with that?"

"It sounds wonderful."

"Okay, have some steak?"

I cut the steak and we started eating. I hadn't eaten since breakfast and everything tasted good. After we finished the steaks the soup was cool enough to drink out of the cups and we drank it without taking a breath.

The room was dark and there was a little breeze coming in the window. We didn't talk much until we finished eating and then Alice stretched out on the bed and lit a cigarette.

"I wish I could go to sleep," she said.

I put the silver lids back on the tray and shoved the things out of the way. I lit a cigarette and stretched out beside her.

We smoked in the darkness and didn't talk. After a while I put my cigarette out and turned on my side and kissed her as soft as I could on the lips. She turned her head and looked at me and her eyes were big and shining.

"Johnny, what did you mean when you said everything was going to be all right?"

"I don't know, baby. I wish I did."

"What are we going to do about him, Johnny?"

We looked at each other for a long time without saying anything. Something was building between us, something that scared me and made me cold all over. We knew what we were thinking but we couldn't put it into words.

"I don't know what we'll do," I said.

"I'm scared, Johnny. I'm afraid of him and I'm afraid I won't be able to be with you."

"What are you scared of Frank about?"

Her voice was low, so low I had to lean closer to hear.

"He knows something is wrong. I didn't tell you this, but Lesser called the night Frank got home. He asked to talk to me and it worried Frank. The next night you called and then hung up when he asked who it was. That made him furious. He came in and asked what was going on and who these men were that always were calling. I told him it was probably a wrong number but I knew he wasn't fooled. He's been watching me ever since with a sort of strange look. I'll be reading the paper or something and when I look up I'll find him watching me. It's getting on my nerves."

"It's not easy, I can see that," I said.

"And I don't like to have him touch me," she said. "That's caused trouble. I've lied to him about not feeling well so far, but he is my husband and I can't go on lying forever."

"Would he give you a divorce?"

"No. It's against his religion for one thing, and if I asked him he'd know then that I'd been seeing someone else while he was gone. I think that would drive him insane. I think he's insane right now. Last night he took a gun out of his army bag and loaded it and when I asked him what the idea was he just said he liked to have a gun around the house."

We didn't talk any more for a long while. I was thinking about what she'd said and I knew we couldn't go on this way. Things were heading for an explosion and I didn't like it.

SHE looked at her watch but it was too dark to tell the time, so I lit

a match and held it close to her wrist and we could see that it was almost ten o'clock.

"I've got to be going," she said.

I held the burning match between us and looked at her and I could see her eyes shining in the light like a cat's. We stared at each other and the silence built up and what we were thinking was ready to come out.

We knew what we wanted and we knew what we had to do to get it and that scared us. The thinking about it made us lie there staring at each other without saying a word while the match flickered and finally went out.

The darkness covered everything. But we still looked at each other; when my eyes got used to the dark again I could see her eyes, two shiny points in the blackness.

"We've got to get rid of him, Johnny," she said.

I knew she was going to say that. If she hadn't I would have had to myself. But when the words came out, and what we were thinking was in the open, I felt a chill go up my back.

"Yes, we've got to get rid of him," I said.

It was out in the open and it took the pressure off us. We knew what we had to do, and we knew where we stood.

I kissed her then and she closed her eyes.

"I love you, Johnny."

"You've got to be going," I said. "Don't even think about what we just said. Let me do the thinking. We're going to get rid of him but we'll do it so they'll never connect us with it. We've got to make it fool-proof and air-tight, and when we do it we've got to stick together all the way."

"How long will it take?" she said.

"That doesn't matter. The thing is it's got to be right. We can't take even the slightest chance. We don't see

each other from now on, get that? When I've got it figured out I'll get in touch with you at the office. If anything breaks and you have to talk to me call me here at noon. And call from a drug store. Have you got all that?"

"I've got it, Johnny."

"All right, get dressed. We don't want to make him any more suspicious than he is already."

"It's all right now, Johnny, but I'm going to be afraid again when I'm alone."

That's the way I felt. But I didn't say anything more about it.

When she kissed me goodbye and cried a little, I was still all right. She went to the door and on out without looking back.

Then I was afraid. I knew what we were going to do and I knew what it was going to mean.

The room was quiet and warm now and I was twenty stories above the street in a comfortable bed. But I was cold and empty.

CHAPTER IV

THE next morning the idea came to me. It didn't come in pieces, one at a time, but suddenly it was right there in my mind, all put together, neat and perfect.

I was shaving when it hit me and I must have stood there looking at myself for a couple of minutes, with my razor in my hand and the lather drying on my face.

It looked so perfect I was afraid of it. I turned it around and around and I couldn't see a flaw anywhere. I was so excited that my hands started shaking, because this would do it. No slip-ups and no risks. I don't know where it came from, the idea I mean, but there it was, a perfect way to get rid of him and leave Alice and I in the clear.

I finished shaving in a hurry and dressed and went downstairs for breakfast. I went into the lobby restaurant, a cheerful room with light-wood paneling, brown linoleum on the floor and flowers on the tables.

I sat down at a table in the corner and a girl I knew, a kid named Marie, came over to get my order. She worked there as a waitress and she was a cute twist. I had taken her out a few times a long while ago.

I told her what I wanted and she went away with the order. I sat there, smoking, turning over all the angles of this idea of mine.

Marie brought my orange juice, and right then another idea clicked in my mind. I was going to need a girl when things broke. I had to have a cover-up, so no copper would connect me with Alice and get any funny ideas. Right here with my orange juice was the girl I could use.

She had started away, but I said, "Hey, wait a minute." She came back. "What's the matter, Johnny?"

"Can't you say hello to an old friend? Here I am, all tired out and I don't even get a cheery hello from an old pal."

"You all tired out? That's hot. It's eleven o'clock and I'll bet you just got up. I know guys that have been working three or four hours already this morning."

She was smiling and so was I. "I had a bad night, Marie. I was up all night with a sick friend's wife."

"You haven't changed any then."

"Cut it out. You know I'm not that type."

"You *have* changed then."

She was kidding and she kept smiling. She was what I needed all right.

She was little, with nice slim arms and legs and a tiny waist. She had blonde hair curled close to her head and she always looked clean and fresh. There

wasn't anything bright about her—she even looked dumb in a nice way, with bright, baby-blue eyes, a snub nose and a red little mouth she kept half open most of the time. But, like most girls, she was smart about guys.

She was the kind of girl who would let you do about anything you wanted if you were going to marry her, and if she thought it would help the deal along. But if you just wanted a good time you couldn't get near her.

That's why I'd stopped taking her out. She hadn't been mad about it, she knew the kind of a guy I was and she knew she wasn't losing anything when I stopped coming around.

Now I needed her for this idea of mine, and suddenly I knew it was going to work.

"Look, honey," I said. "How about looking the town over tonight with me?"

She smiled, an uncertain, almost cautious smile. "What's all this? You think I've changed about things?"

"What things?"

"Oh, you know." Her smile widened a little. "What's the matter? All your other girls getting married?"

"All my girls? Thanks for the compliment, but I'm living like a monk. Well, how about it?"

SHE laughed a little and made a few more cracks but finally she said okay. I told her I'd pick her up at six-thirty and she said that would be fine. She was through at six and she needed a half hour to change and get cleaned up.

I made the date to pick her up at the restaurant because I didn't want to drive out to where she lived.

She brought the rest of my food and stood around while I ate, kidding with me. I left her a half buck tip and stood up to go.

She said, "Six-thirty, right here?"

"Right here, honey." I patted her on the shoulder and went back up to my room.

I felt wonderful. The first step of the idea was already working. I called Alice's office and gave the operator her local number. In a few seconds she was on the phone.

"Don't use my name," I said. "But I've got to see you at noon."

There was a little pause. Then she said, "He was pretty bad last night. I don't know—"

"Get over here. This is important. It's about what we talked about last night."

". . . All right."

"Good. See you at one."

I hung up and put the phone back in place. It was eleven-thirty and I had some work to do so I got at it. I checked over my bets and found out I was way ahead. The favorites all ran out and that's always good for a bookie. He naturally takes a lot of bets on the favorites, and when they don't show, it's money in his pocket. Not heavy dough, but it all adds up.

I put in a few calls and took a few bets by twelve-thirty. Then I took a shower because it was another one of those humid days and my shirt was stuck to my back. After that I sat around and waited for Alice.

She was on time. At one o'clock, or just a few minutes after, she knocked and I opened the door.

She had the same scared look I'd noticed the day before.

I kissed her and then I held her away from me and looked into her eyes.

"Changed your mind about anything?" I said.

"No, Johnny, I haven't changed my mind." She sat down in the big chair, put her head back and closed her eyes. She was wearing a blue silk dress with

white shoes, and her hair looked blacker than I'd ever seen it before. She looked beautiful, but she looked tired, too.

I sat down on the arm of the chair and put my hand on her shoulder.

"Matter, baby?"

"Last night was terrible, Johnny. I didn't get home until almost eleven-thirty. The el was a local and it seemed to take forever to get out there. He was waiting for me. He called the office about nine and didn't get any answer. He wanted to know who I was out with and what kind of a sucker I thought he was, and all the while he was walking up and down the room and swinging his arms around like a maniac. When I finally got to bed he came in and said I was going to start acting like a wife or he'd know the reason why."

I began to get cold and tight all over. "And you did, I suppose?"

"What else could I do? Oh, I detest him, Johnny!"

She started to cry. Her expression didn't change at all, but the tears kept running down her cheeks, making muddy little tracks in her make-up. It was terrible to watch.

I TOOK both of her hands and held them close to my face and kissed them. "Baby, baby, don't cry. I know it's hell but it's not going to last much longer. I've got it all figured out now."

She kept crying but she opened her eyes and looked at me. Even with the tears I could see they were shining a little, the way they did when she wanted something bad. She didn't say anything, just looked at me with those shiny eyes and finally she stopped crying and waited for me to talk.

"Now, listen," I said. "We don't have much time and you've got to get all of this straight the first time. I don't know what you were thinking when you said we had to get rid of him.

If you had an idea about killing him—well, that's out. We couldn't get away with that in a million years. I know cops and I know how they work. When a husband is killed the first person they check is the wife. They check to see if she had any reason for killing him, and they look hard to see if she's been cheating on him. You see, they know ninety-nine times out of a hundred if a wife is cheating on her husband, and the husband gets killed, that the wife and her boy friend are the ones who did it.

"If we did anything crazy like that, here's what they do. They'd go over your life with a fine-tooth comb. They'd talk to every friend you've got, to the neighbors, to the girl who gives you permanents, to the place you buy your food. Pretty soon they'd know more about you than you do yourself. They'd know where you spent your time, what size shoes you wear, and how many spoons of sugar you use in your coffee. And while they were learning all that they'd find out about us.

"When they had all that, they'd know about my part in your life. We've covered up pretty well but not that good. They'd find out you went on your vacation to New York last year with me, and they'd find out about that lodge in Wisconsin where we spent those week-ends. They'd come across people who'd say, 'Yeah, I remember her. She was with a guy,' and they'd find desk clerks who remember what I looked like. And pretty soon they'd have me. And, baby, when they had that much on us, we'd be through. One slip, one mistake and they'd tear us apart. No two people in the world are strong enough to fight a thing like that. They'd show you a confession with my name on it, blaming you for everything. And they'd be showing me the same. They'd type the confessions and get our signa-

tures by having us sign our names on what looked like a blank piece of paper. They'd offer you an easy deal if you'd talk and they'd do the same for me. We wouldn't see each other. All we'd know is what we were told and pretty soon we'd split wide open."

I stopped there and lit cigarettes for both of us.

"They couldn't tear us apart," she said.

I said, "They aren't going to get the chance. Here's what we're going to do. Frank suspects you of running around with some guy while he was away. He's got a gun. He's half out of his head. Okay, that's number one. Here's number two. Your boss, Lesser, has had a yen for you for a long time. All you have to do is wiggle a hip at him and he'd follow you anywhere.

"Now we're going to make those two things do the job for us. We'll steam Frank up even worse than he is, and we'll steam Lesser up, too.

"Then we'll fix it so Frank learns about Lesser and catches him with you. Do you see it? Can you guess what Frank's going to do when he catches Lesser in a spot like that?"

Her eyes were beginning to shine with a hot light. "He's going to go wild."

"Right. He's even going to do more than that. He'll blow Lesser's head off. Right then he's hooked. The unwritten law won't help him the way juries are these days. It'll still be murder. He'll go up for a long trip and we'll be way out in the clear. Don't you see how perfect it is, baby?"

She leaned her head wearily against my arm. "If you say it's all right—it must be, Johnny." She closed her eyes and drew a long tired breath. "I don't care how we do it, but please make it fast. I can't stand this much longer."

"We can't rush it," I told her. "I've got a lot of details to work out yet,

but I'll get it done. It's really as simple as sin, baby. It's got to happen in your apartment. You've got to arrange for Lesser to see you some night. I'll help all I can, but mainly it's your job. I'll be the one to figure out a way to get Frank out of the apartment, yet still bring him back in time to catch Lesser with you."

I COULDN'T see how it would miss.

The perfect part was how the cops would have a clean-cut case against Frank and they wouldn't go snooping into Alice's life. If they didn't look they wouldn't find me. But I wasn't taking any chances. I was coppering every bet, no matter how small it was. That's why I'd made the date with the blonde for that night. I was going to see her a lot before the blow-off, so if anything did go wrong and the cops started hunting around, looking for a frame, they wouldn't connect me with it. They wouldn't find Johnny Ford, an unattached guy. They would find Johnny Ford, who had a steady girl—a girl he might even be getting ready to marry. That would be a cinch to keep them from connecting me with Alice.

Alice was rubbing her cheek slowly against my sleeve. She said, "What do I do first, Johnny?" Her voice was perfectly steady.

"First, work on Lesser," I said. "Have a drink with him a couple of nights after work and give him the idea you think he's pretty hot stuff. Hint around that you'd like him to come up some night, if it wasn't for your husband. He'll believe you because that's what he wants to believe. Then, after that's going pretty well, start working on Frank. You don't have to do much there but give him the idea you're afraid of something. Afraid of something he might find out. Be nice to him sometimes, real nice. Make him a swell

dinner and stuff like that, then come home late the next night. See? Make him think you're being nice just to cover up what's going on."

She nodded. "I can do all that. But when will I see you?"

"You're not going to see me," I said. "We can't take any more chances. When I get everything else figured out I'll call you at the office. Until then, just do what I've told you. After that's all set we'll fix things to bring them together. But remember this, baby. This isn't a two-dollar bet we're making. The whole bank roll is going and we aren't going to let one thing slip. We've got a life-time ahead of us. We aren't going to spend it in jail."

She pulled my head down and kissed me on the mouth.

"I wish it was all over, Johnny. I want to be with you all the time. I hate being afraid. I hate being with him and I hate being away from you, not even knowing where you are or what you're doing."

"It won't be too long, baby," I said. "The important thing is to do this right. Just hang on tight a little while longer."

I kissed her then and I felt her lips opening under mine, soft and warm. I drew closer to her and we stayed together that way a long while without talking. When I moved away and looked at her I could see her eyes shining.

"How soon do you have to be back at the office?"

"There's time, Johnny. There's time."

CHAPTER V

AFTER she left I took another shower and went across the Loop to a bookie's where there was generally a card game going. I didn't have much else to do and sometimes ideas come to

me when I'm playing cards.

Four guys were playing poker at a corner table, so I moved in to make it five. I knew the others: horse players, touts, or anything else that would turn a fast buck.

There wasn't much action and I played a couple of hours, staying about even and not paying much attention to the game. I was wrapped up with angles on how to make the plan I had outlined to Alice look natural. It had to look natural or the coppers wouldn't buy it.

About five I figured it was time to go back and get ready for my date with the blonde. I told the other players it was my last hand.

I was sitting on the dealer's right. The man on his left opened for two dollars and the next hand raised. Artie Nolan was next and after a look at his cards he said, "What the hell," and threw them in.

I picked up my cards one at a time. There was a deuce, a four, a tray, and a six—all clubs. I felt a nice little buzz of excitement.

I had four clubs, the two, three, four and six. Any club would give me a flush, and the five of clubs would make it a straight flush.

I put the last card in with the other four and shuffled them for a while. Then I spread them out slowly and took a look. There was the deuce. The trey. The six. The four. I moved the four of clubs real slow and took a peek at the last card. The five of clubs.

Somebody said, "Stop sweating them out. It's four bucks to you. What d'ya say?"

With my straight flush I raised, of course. The dealer raised, too, and the two other guys called. I raised the dealer once again and he called.

One of the other guys must have

figured we were trying to scare him out because he raised, and then there were a couple of more raises before all the hands were called and we were ready to draw cards.

The dealer was pat. The guy next to him took two cards, trying to help threes, I guess, and the next hand drew one card and I figured him for a straight, open at both ends, or maybe a four card flush.

I was pat. The betting was slow after we drew cards because of the two pat hands, but the two guys who drew cards helped their hands, so it wasn't too bad.

It was a screwy deal, all right. The dealer had a pat full house; the next guy filled up an ace-high straight and the last man drew a pair to his threes and came up with another full house.

We saw all this after the betting was over and we put our hands down. I showed them my straight flush and picked up the money. There was seventy-eight bucks in the pot, which wasn't hard to take.

The dealer tossed his cards on the table and said, "You do all right. A straight flush. I've heard of such things."

I laughed. That was the way I felt. Lucky all the way down the line. I knew luck was going to be with me all the way—and with some to spare.

I put the bills away and got into my coat and hat.

"Too bad I can't stick around," I said. "I like the way you guys donate."

The dealer said, "What's the hurry?"

"What do you think would take me away from a soft touch like this?"

"A babe? Who is she?"

"That little blonde that works in the hotel restaurant. Know her?"

"I've seen her. Nice looking kid. How long you been chasing her?"

I grinned. "It's the other way

around. She's been hugging my heels for months."

IT WAS an angle I hadn't thought of before, but I realized now it would be a good idea to plant the idea that I'd been going around with the blonde for some time. It was a small thing by itself, but if anybody started asking questions around town they might find out I'd started dating her just a week or so before the big blow-up. Unless I could plant it otherwise.

So I said, "I been taking her out for a couple months now. She's a good kid. Hell, I might even let her make an honest man out of me."

They all laughed at that and then one of the guys, Artie Nolan, said, "Johnny, what ever happened to that dark-haired baby you used to run around with?"

The remark didn't amount to anything, but I turned cold all over. This was the kind of crack that could grow into something serious.

I said, "Which one? You mean that babe who used to come in from Detroit?"

"I don't know where she came from. I saw her with you a time or two. Out North, I think. She was tall, beautiful gams. Too bad she only had two of them."

He meant Alice. I said, "She was a dancer. Used to work in a joint on State Street. Her name was Lola. I think she married some guy from Jersey. Probably got an apartment full of kids by now."

"Yeah, she looked like a dancer," Nolan said. "Real classy legs."

"Well," the dealer said impatiently, "are we going to play cards or sit around and talk about dames?"

"I got to be going," I said. "Thanks for the contribution, boys. Take it easy."

"Be good, Johnny."

I went back to my room. It was about five-twenty then so I took a quick shower and changed my clothes. I dressed carefully because I wanted to impress this blonde right from the start.

I had a new gray gabardine suit that set me back a hundred and fifty bucks and it looked every penny of it. I wore that with a pearl gray shirt and a tie with a picture on it of a guy throwing a rope at a cow. It was one of those hand-painted ties and it cost like hell.

All the time I was dressing, my mind kept turning things over. The little brush at the card game made me nervous. If something slipped and the coppers figured it was a frame they might start nosing around and they could run into a guy like Artie Nolan who remembered seeing me with Alice. That would give them the tie-in.

I made myself a drink, lit a cigarette and sat down to think things over. If it worked the way I figured, there was nothing to worry about. Frank would come barging in, find Lesser with Alice, and shoot him quick—and dead.

That would be that. The cops would have an open-and-shut case. Murder is murder and it's no different because the guy you kill happened to be cozying with your wife. You might get away with that in books but it doesn't work in courtrooms. Frank wouldn't get the chair—particularly if it was jury trial—but they'd send him away for a nice stretch.

What the hell was there to worry about?

I felt better then, even though I didn't have all the details figured out. But they'd come. They would have to come.

After a while I went downstairs to pick up the blonde. She wasn't around, but one of the other girls told me she

was getting ready and would be out in a few minutes.

I sat down at a table and smoked a cigarette, not thinking much of anything until she came out of the powder room and walked over to where I was sitting.

She had on a white print dress, pleated across the skirt. Her make-up was on nice and even and the way her blonde curls were fixed close to her head made her look about sixteen years old. She was cute, all right. Nice little body, pretty legs, lots of make-up. She didn't look cheap exactly, but she looked like what she was—a cute little waitress, out for a big time.

She smiled at me, showing even little teeth.

"I'm sorry I was late, but I was kind of rushed at the last minute," she said.

"Think nothing of it," I said, smiling. "Waiting for you is a good deal."

She liked that, I could tell. The guys she knew probably never talked that way.

I TOOK her by the arm and we went outside. I was taking her to the Palmer House so there was no point in using my car.

It was a hot night and the street was crowded with people on their way home and others looking for a place to eat. There was a lot of traffic and noise, so there wasn't any use in trying to talk.

We waited under the canopy of the hotel while the doorman got us a cab. When one stopped we got in and I told the driver to take us to the Palmer House.

She looked over at me and smiled self-consciously. "I wish I'd known this morning I was going to the Palmer House. I'd have dressed different."

"What for? You look swell."

"I should have worn stockings," she

said. "A girl shouldn't go out to dinner at a nice place without stockings."

She looked down at her shoes. They were white, open-toed pumps that showed her red toenails. She had on an ankle bracelet and some kind of leg make-up. Her legs were pretty and it didn't matter whether she wore stockings or not and she knew it as well as I did. She just wanted me to look at them.

The air was cool and fresh in the Palmer House lobby. We went up the steps to the Empire Room.

The head waiter smiled and said hello and led us to a good table at the edge of the dance floor. A bus boy put glasses of water and napkins in front of us and a waiter brought over the wine menu. She wanted a Tom Collins and I had a Martini and pretty soon we were sitting with drinks in front of us, looking at each other across a two foot table. She sipped her drink and looked at me over the edge of the glass.

She said: "You could have knocked me over with a feather when you asked me to go out today. Honestly, it was the last thing in the world I expected."

"Don't give me that. A girl like you shouldn't be surprised when somebody wants to take her out. You should be surprised if they didn't."

We talked a little more, but she was a little embarrassed. She couldn't figure out what I wanted and she didn't want to be too agreeable until she knew what I had in mind.

The waiter came back and we ordered some food. The headwaiter was there to see that everything was all right. He said hello to the blonde and smiled at her as if she came in every night.

She got a kick out of that. She smiled back at him and acted damn near like she wanted him to sit down

and have a drink with us.

After dinner we talked for a while and then I took her to a night club where they had a big name comedian and a pretty good floor show. This was Wednesday and about twelve o'clock she said she'd better be getting home because she had to work the next day.

We walked over to get my car and I drove out to where she lived, about the thirty hundred block on the North side, in a two-story frame house her father owned. They lived on the first floor and rented out the second floor to some of her old man's relatives. Her mother had died when she was just a kid and she lived alone with her father.

The neighborhood was one of those respectable, lower-class districts, where everybody sits out on the porch in their stockinged feet after supper. The men smoke black pipes and the women, who seem to be pregnant the year 'round, just sit there and rock.

I knew that kind of neighborhood and I knew the people because I came from that kind of street. You go to church on Sunday, you play ball in the streets and in the summertime the firemen come around and open up a hydrant and give all the kids a bath.

We sat outside in the car and smoked a cigarette apiece and we didn't talk. Finally I tossed my cigarette away and looked at her. "I don't want to keep you up, honey," I said. "You've got to be up pretty early."

She looked at me in a peculiar way. "All right. I'll go in."

She got out and I walked to the front porch with her. I knew what she was thinking.

I caught her arm as she started up the steps.

"Wait a minute, honey. Are you mad at me?"

"I'm not mad," she said. "But it's

funny. A guy takes a girl out and acts like he likes her and spends a lot of money and then doesn't even try to kiss her."

SHE was facing me and I could see her pretty clear in the light from the street lamp. She didn't look mad; she looked confused and a little like a kid about to cry.

"I feel different about you," I said. "I like you in another kind of way."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I hardly know myself, but you've hit me hard, honey. How about tomorrow night?"

"Well, if you want to see me you can."

"I want to. How about the same time, same place?"

"That's fine, Johnny," she said, and she looked at me, waiting for me to do something.

I didn't do anything so finally she said, "Good night," in a choked voice and went up the steps.

I waited until she was in the house, then I got back in the car and drove down town. I went up to my room and mixed a drink and stretched out on the bed.

All I could think about was Alice. I wondered what she was doing.

The next day I worked and caught up on my bets. My luck had swung around the other way and it wasn't so good. I was still ahead of the game though, and bad streaks never last forever.

The night I picked up the blonde and took her to dinner and then made a stop at the Chez Paree. We had a table within spit-ball distance of a lot of characters who make the papers every day or so for being short on their income tax or having drunken rows with their wives in the middle of some hotel lobby. I told the blonde their

names and her eyes opened wide.

She was impressed and for the rest of the time we were there she kept one eye on them like they were something that would grow mushrooms out of their ears.

I took her home pretty early and I kissed her a few times in the car. She seemed happy about that, but it was all pretty mild. Maybe that's what she liked.

That was on a Thursday night. She had to stay home Friday night but I made a date for Saturday to take her to the track. That was her day off and she'd never seen a race.

When I got home that night I was worried and nervous. I hadn't talked to Alice in a couple of days and it had me up in the air.

Friday morning at ten o'clock I called her. I didn't have anything much to say, but I had to know how things were going. When she came to the phone, I said, "Johnny. Anything new?"

"I was going to call you at noon," she said. "Something's happened. Where can I see you?"

I thought for a minute. "There's a bar on Jackson, just the other side of State, called Murphy's. There's a bar in front and some booths in back. I'll be in one of the booths at one o'clock. All right?"

"I'll be there."

"Okay, see you."

She hung up and I sat there for a while trying to figure out what could have happened. I lit a cigarette and turned a lot of thoughts over in my head. A million things could have happened. Whatever it was it was something important. I could tell that from her voice.

At one o'clock I was sitting in Murphy's. The back part of the place was dark and there wasn't anybody else

in the place except an old guy in a wrinkled linen suit drinking a beer.

I ordered a beer and it was still in front of me when she came in about ten after one. She saw me right away and came over and sat down, facing me across the narrow wooden table.

WE LOOKED at each other a moment, not saying anything. Our hands were on the table, almost touching. She looked the way I liked her to look. A little tense and with that hard streak in her showing through.

"What is it?" I said.

"We're leaving town Sunday night for three weeks," she said. "We're going to a cottage in Wisconsin for a vacation and then he's coming back to his job."

"When did all this happen?"

"Yesterday. He's already made the arrangements." She looked down at her hands and then she shot a quick glance at me. "What news do you have?"

"None. I haven't got it figured out yet."

"You'd better get busy."

"This kind of thing can't be rushed, baby. Why don't you tell him to go to hell? Tell him you've work at the office you can't leave."

"He wouldn't stand for that now, Johnny." She looked down at the table and when she looked up again her eyes were wet and shining. "Johnny, I'm depending on you. Don't let him take me away."

"You're not going, baby," I said. I put my hand over hers. "I'll get you out."

And right then it came to me. It came just like the first idea, all in one piece, put together and ready to go.

She must have seen it in my face because she leaned forward quickly. "What is it, Johnny?"

"This Wisconsin deal is perfect. We couldn't have hit on anything better." I leaned closer to her and shot a look around the room. The guy in the wrinkled suit had finished his beer and gone. We were all alone but I cut my voice down anyway.

"How have you done with Lesser?"

"Just as you told me."

"Has it worked?"

"Yes, it has. I had a drink with him last night before I went home. He seemed even more interested than usual today. I tried to give him the impression that the first night I had free would be a party for both of us."

"Perfect. Now tomorrow you're going to tell him your husband is going out of town Sunday night."

"But I'm going too, Johnny."

"Listen to me baby. Tell him exactly that. Tell him you'd like to see him Sunday night at your apartment for a drink. And make sure he gets the idea there's more than a drink waiting for him. Can you handle that?"

"I think I can. I can get him to come, but what good will it do?"

"I'm getting to that," I said. "Now you're supposed to go with Frank Sunday night. How're you going?"

"By train."

"Has he got the tickets yet?"

"No, it isn't necessary to get them in advance. It's a night train and seldom crowded."

"What time does it leave?"

"Seven-thirty, railroad time."

"That's eight-thirty, city time." I thought fast, figuring out time angles. She was watching me, her eyes shining.

"Now," I said, "you get to work on Lesser this afternoon. Don't wait till tomorrow."

"I'll do it, if you say so Johnny, but I can't see what good it will do."

"Here's what I've worked out. I want you to have Lesser come to your apart-

ment at eight-fifteen Sunday night. Remember that time. Eight-fifteen. Make sure he's right on time. And here's the next step. You aren't going to Wisconsin with Frank. Tell him you can't make it and that you'll meet him there Monday."

"Johnny, he won't stand for that."

"You've got to make him stand for it. Everything depends on that. Tell him some work came up that you've simply got to handle at the office Monday morning. Tell him anything, but you've got to start him off to Wisconsin alone. That's the way it's got to be."

SHE took a long breath and was quiet for a while. Then she said. "I can do it." Her voice was bitter. She didn't look at me, just kept her eyes on the table. "I know one way to make him happy. Tomorrow morning he'll be agreeable."

I swallowed hard. She couldn't have made it plainer. "That's up to you," I said.

"All right. Then what happens?"

"I'm going to call Frank," I said. "Maybe this afternoon. I'll shoot the bull with him until he mentions the trip. Then I'll offer to drive the two of you down to the station Sunday night. Got that? When he tells you about it remember to act surprised. Then when I get there Sunday night you won't be going and that will be my turn to be surprised. But I'll still take Frank down to the station alone."

She looked at me. "Then on the way down you tell him I'm entertaining Lesser? So that he'll come charging back like a wild animal? Is that it, Johnny?"

"I don't do any crazy goddam thing of the kind," I snapped. "Use your head, baby. How the hell would I know you were entertaining? Remember I know Lesser. I'll just casually mention

to Frank that I saw Lesser at lunch during the week. And I'll say it's too bad he couldn't see you about those figures some other night. Frank thinks you're working Monday morning, and when I drop the word that it's Sunday night—that will touch things off."

She twisted her hands nervously. "It seems terribly complicated," she said.

"Well do we, or don't we?" I said. "Make up your mind. Do you want to get rid of that guy and live with me, or what?"

"All right," she said. "I'll do what you've told me and I'll call you Sunday afternoon and let you know."

I closed my hand over hers and squeezed it hard. "It'll work out," I said.

We didn't talk any more about it then. We had something to eat and a beer and I got out. It was a chance being with her, a long one, but still a chance. I didn't want some guy remembering a thing like that when this deal was over.

I went back to the hotel. My work had been messed up for the last week, and it's a kind of business that costs you money when you aren't watching all angles.

The day before, a long shot had come in and that hurt. I'd laid off most with the syndicate exchange, but I was still caught short.

I counted the cash in my wallet. I had twelve hundred bucks. There was a thousand more in the bank. That wasn't too bad but there were times when it had been a lot better.

I put the money back in my wallet and was ready to go to work when the phone rang and the operator said there was a friend of mine in the lobby by the name of Frank Olson.

I sat there for a while just looking at the receiver.

"Mr. Ford? Shall I send him up?"

"Yes, send him up."

I put the phone down carefully and sat down on the edge of the bed.

What the hell did this mean? He couldn't have tumbled to anything.

I lit a cigarette and got up and walked back and forth trying to think of everything at once, and trying to get my nerves under control.

There was a knock on the door. When I opened it he was standing there, looking bigger than ever in civilian clothes now, a sports outfit and a shirt open at the neck.

He smiled slowly, and I thought he look a bit uncertain.

"Hope I'm not barging in while you're busy, Johnny," he said.

CHAPTER VI

I FIGURED from his smile there wasn't anything to worry about. But it took a few seconds for the sudden tightness inside me to go away.

I smiled and put out my hand, trying to do it easy and natural. I said, "Come on in, hero. You're looking good for yourself."

He came in and glanced around a bit. He kept on smiling a little, like he was embarrassed.

"I hope you're not busy. I don't want to take you away from your work."

I laughed. "You ought to know me better than that. I don't like work so well I can't walk away from it."

I told him to sit down and I went over to the table and picked up a bottle. "You can have anything you want to drink as long as it's bourbon and water."

"Anything you got is fine, Johnny," he said.

"Coming right up. What's new? Like this civilian deal okay?"

"Yeah, it's fine."

"Swell. Aren't going back to the

army, eh?"

"Not as long as I got all my marbles," he laughed.

I brought him his drink and sat down facing him. He looked at the drink in his hand and then took a little sip.

"This is the stuff," he said. "We couldn't get this overseas. Had to drink that lousy cognac they make in France."

"Well, drink up. There's plenty more where that came from."

I wondered what was on his mind. He might just have dropped in to say hello and kill some time but that didn't seem likely.

He lifted his glass and said, "Here's to you, Johnny," and drank about half of the contents without taking a breath. I drank a little, too, and said, "Well, how's Alice?"

"Pretty good."

"You're looking sharp yourself. Decided yet when you're going back to work?"

"In about three weeks. Alice and I are taking a little vacation first. We're going away Sunday."

I let him see it was all news to me. "That's great," I said. "Where you going?"

"To the Lakes. We're taking that fish special the Northwestern runs up there."

"You're lucky," I said. "How about another drink?"

"I think I've had enough." He looked at his glass as if he was checking on that and then he nodded his head. "Yeah, I've got plenty here for the time being."

We didn't say anything for a little while. He kept looking at his glass and I could tell he was nervous. He wanted to say something but he was having trouble getting it out. He took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his forehead and put it away again and

went back to looking at his glass.

"Hot, isn't it?" he said.

"Well, how about a drink?"

He smiled. "Don't care if I change my mind, do you?"

"That's what it's here for," I said. I took his glass, gave him a healthy slug of bourbon and put in some ice water. He took a deep swallow, then said, "I came up here to talk about Alice, Johnny. That may surprise you but that's the truth. You asked me how things were going and I said swell. That was a lie. Things are no good at all between us. I've just got to talk to somebody before I blow my top."

I didn't know how to handle it or what to say. I fiddled with my drink and tried to keep anything from showing in my face. Inside I was winding up tight.

"That's too bad," I said finally. "I thought you kids were getting along. What's the trouble?"

"She's changed. She doesn't care much for me anymore." He stared down into his drink and when he looked up at me again his face was red. I didn't know if it was from the liquor or the way he was feeling. "It's not her fault, Johnny. Some guy got to her while I was gone. That's what happened."

THE room seemed especially quiet when he stopped talking. I shot a look at him and he was staring at me like something inside him was ready to come apart.

"I think I know the guy," he said slowly.

I took a long slow breath. My two hands were around the glass and they were squeezing it hard.

"Who?"

"Do you know a guy named Lesser?" he said.

I let my breath out, but my heart was still hitting my ribs like a hammer.

"I've met him a few times," I said. "He's Alice's boss, isn't he?"

"That's right. What kind of a guy is he?"

I knew I was now, and the tension inside me began to ease up. He was half way down the road we'd put him on and this was my chance to send him the rest of the way. "Quite a big guy with the women, I understand," I said. "I don't know him very well. That's just the talk I hear."

"I think he's been hanging around Alice," he said. "She talks about him a lot, and he's called a couple of times since I've been back."

"I've heard her talk about him, too, but hell, I never thought" I stopped talking and looked down at my drink like I was embarrassed at saying too much.

"That's why I'm making Alice quit her job," he said. "Maybe after three weeks alone with her we can get back to the way we used to be."

"Sure, sure," I said. "That should do it." I tried to sound like I wanted to agree with everything he said. But I made sure I wasn't very convincing.

He finished his drink and got up slowly, as if he was tired. "I supposed you think I'm a damn fool for bothering you like this," he said, with an unsteady smile. "But I just didn't know anybody else to talk to. You saw her while I was away and I knew you'd be willing to listen." He walked over to the door and stood there, shaking his head. When he began to talk again, I don't think he remembered I was standing there listening.

"You see, we never thought about things like this overseas. There was enough to worry about just staying alive and putting up with all the brass and mud and bad weather. Home was just a place a long way off where everything was going along right. Maybe we

were wrong. But we kind of thought we were heroes doing a big job. When we came across a States-side magazine, all the articles were full of stories about GI's and what great guys they were. And all the advertising made us think all the cars and washing machines and electric toasters in the world were just waiting for us. We got to thinking everybody at home was rooting for us and that all we had to do was stay alive and get back and everything would be fine. That's what makes it so tough when you run into a deal like this. You're just not ready for it. You've got nothing inside you to fight it with."

He said all that while he stood there at the door and looked at a spot, on the wall a foot or so over my head. Finally he shook his head abruptly and his face turned red.

"I must sound like a dope," he said. "I don't know what got into me to start sounding off that way."

"It's tough," I said. I didn't know what else to say. I wished to God he'd get out and try his speeches on somebody else. But first I had an angle to fix.

"You're going Sunday night? How about letting me give you a lift down to the station? I'm going to be out in your neighborhood around seven-thirty, so it won't take me out of my way."

"Thanks. That would be swell," he said.

"Fine. I'll pick you up around a quarter to eight. Okay?"

He said that would be fine and we shook hands and he went out the door.

I made another drink and sat down and thought about things for a while. It was all so close to being set that I was nervous. Now if Alice handled her end as well . . .

The next day was Saturday and I took the little blonde out to Arlington to see the nags run. It was a nice day,

clear and sunny, and she was dressed like she was going to picnic.

I FELT a little sorry for her. She'd never been to the track and she didn't know that woman went there to show off their clothes and the men went there to show off their women. She was wearing a little white dress and a bracelet with junk hanging from it and moccasins and white ankle socks on her small feet.

I guess she thought the track was a place where you spread a blanket on the grass and drank pop and ate hot dogs while you watched the races.

I had a season pass to the club house which is air-conditioned and glassed-in, and when we walked in and she got a look at the way the dames were dressed I saw a lot of color come into her face.

We had a table with a good view of the track and there was a page behind us to take our bets and waiters ready to bring us drinks.

After I ordered a couple of drinks she leaned over and said, "Why didn't you tell me it was like this?" She took a quick look around at the other women. "I feel like a fool."

"Don't worry about it," I grinned. "Most of these dames owe some guy for the clothes they're wearing. And these hot shot guys with the binoculars probably owe half the bookies in town. You could wear a barrel out here as long as you've got plenty of that green stuff handy."

I made a couple of bets in the first race and then we sat there drinking, waiting for the horses to get to the post. She couldn't understand why it took so long to get them started, but when they finally got off she got so excited that the people around us were laughing.

I knew the horses and the jockies and when the race was over it turned out I had made a good bet. Our horse

paid us four to one and she looked at the money with her mouth open. It was probably more than she made in a month.

A city judge came over to say hello to me and have a drink with us. He wouldn't want to be seen with a guy like me in most places but at the track it was all right. He wanted a horse, so I gave him one. He finished his drink in a hurry then, patted the blonde on the hand and said he was charmed to meet her and went back to his own table.

"You know a lot of big people, don't you Johnny?" she said.

"You mean him? He's a creep."

"Well, he's a judge," she said.

"That means he's a thief with a law degree," I told her.

That made a bigger impression on her than meeting him. She looked at me like I was a tin god because I knew enough about a judge to call him a thief. I didn't tell her that was a safe thing to say about almost any judge.

We left after the last race and went out for dinner. I had to close the deal with her now before I set things going the following night. When Frank blew the lid off everything, I wanted to be a long way from the blast, and set so that nobody would ever connect me with it.

After dinner we went to a show and about eleven o'clock I drove out to the lake, at Albion Avenue, and parked and there were a couple of other cars parked there. It was a hot, quiet night. I lit a cigarette, wondering whether this was going to work or not.

"Look, honey," I said. "There's no sense kidding around any longer. I'm nuts about you and I want to do something about it."

I felt her sort of draw away from me. "What do you mean, Johnny?"

"I'm asking you to marry me," I said. "What do you say?"

She was quiet for a long time. I

couldn't see her face in the dark but she was sitting so still that she hardly seemed to be breathing.

"I don't know what to say," she said, at last. "I've been all mixed up since you started taking me out. I figured you must like me pretty well, but you didn't do anything about it."

She turned her head so she could see my expression.

"I mean, you didn't bother me or anything. I never really knew anybody like you before. I mean a guy with money and who knows a lot of important people. It's hard to believe you mean what you're saying."

"I mean it, honey," I said.

I put my arm around her shoulders and pulled her close to me and then I kissed her hard. She seemed thin and small in my arms, and for just a second she pushed against me but then she relaxed and her body pressed close to me and I felt her lips opening under mine.

Finally I let her go. "Does that tell you how I feel, honey?"

SHE came back into my arms with a little cry. "I guess I do love you, Johnny. I was scared you were just taking me around for some other reason. A girl like me has only one way of paying a guy back, and I felt guilty when you were spending all that money because I knew I couldn't give you anything for it. That sounds all mixed up, but I'm really a good girl."

There wasn't anything in that for me to laugh at.

"That wasn't on my mind, honey. I wanted you permanent. And I've got a little surprise for you, now that everything's set."

"What is it, Johnny?"

"It wouldn't be a surprise if I told you."

I kissed her again, thinking all the

while how well things had worked out. I wanted her up in my room tomorrow night so I could get back to her after the deal with Frank was over. She was going to cover for me if anything broke.

I said, "I'll show you tomorrow night."

"It's not a ring, is it?" she said, her voice tight and breathless.

I hadn't thought of that but it was a good idea. It would be one more little touch. "You'll see," I said. "I'll show you tomorrow night. Okay?"

"Anything you say is all right, Johnny," she said.

We talked a while more and I kissed her a few times and all I felt was that it was getting closer to Alice. When I was getting ready to start the car she said, "Johnny, do you mind if I ask you a favor? I'd like you to come out for dinner tomorrow. My old man wants to meet you. I don't like to ask you, but it would make things easier for me."

I started to say no but I thought it over and there was no reason why I couldn't.

So I said, "Sure. That'll be fine, honey."

I took her home, then went back downtown. Driving along, I had the strange feeling that things were piling up on me. I kept looking at all the angles and little by little I began to see that the idea had some holes in it.

A lot of things could happen. I didn't know yet whether Alice had fixed it so Frank would leave for Wisconsin without her. And I didn't know whether she had set the deal with Lesser. I knew how some talkative wolves were. All a girl had to do was take them up on their big talk and they ran like thieves.

There was a lot that wasn't set, and even when it was set there were still things that could louse up the deal.

By the time I got to my room I was wishing it was over with. I went to bed but I couldn't sleep. I was getting tight inside just thinking about what was going to happen.

Finally I got up and poured myself half a glass of whisky and drank it down straight. I coughed until the tears came.

I crawled back into bed and after a while I went to sleep.

CHAPTER VII

THE next morning I woke up late and I felt lousy. When I thought of everything that was going to break that day I was scared.

I shaved and dressed and went downstairs to get some breakfast. While I was drinking my tomato juice I remembered that Alice was going to call me this afternoon and that I was going to be at the blonde's. I decided I'd leave the blonde's number at the desk and tell the operator to give it to Alice when she called.

After I took care of that I called the hotel garage and told them to send my car around. I went out in front and waited for it. The day was warm and sunny and there were a lot of people on the streets walking along with that clean, dressed-up look people have when they come down town on a Sunday.

When the car came around I drove out to the blonde's. There were a bunch of kids playing ball in the street and when I parked they crowded around the car, talking about it and talking about the cars they were going to have when they grew up.

I gave the biggest kid half a buck and told him to watch the car and then I went up the steps and punched the bell. Out in the street the big kid was already chasing the others away and

walking around the car like he owned it. The little kids went half way down the block and then started yelling at him, calling him all the dirty names kids pick up in the street. It didn't bother him. He just kept on walking around the car, paying no attention to them, looking serious and important.

She answered the door herself. She was wearing a black dress that made her look older and there was a little white apron tied around her waist.

"You're right on time," she said. "Come on in."

She led me into the front room and her old man got up out of a chair and stood there wiping his hands on his pants legs. He was short but wide and he had thick gray hair and a skin that looked like cracked leather.

He was wearing his best clothes and not looking very happy about it. Across the front of his black vest was strung a heavy gold watch chain and a high stiff collar dug into the wrinkled skin under his chin.

She said, "Pa, I want you to meet Johnny Ford."

We shook hands. His was a lot bigger than mine and the callouses on it were like the bark on a tree.

"Pleased to meet you," he said. He had a little accent and his voice sounded like it couldn't get quite far enough out of his throat.

I said I was glad to meet him and we all stood there grinning, trying to think of something to say. The blonde wiped her hands on the little apron.

"Well, I got to get back to the dinner," she said. "I'll leave you men here to get acquainted."

When she went out of the room he pointed to a chair and said, "Sit down. How'd you like a drink?"

I said that would be swell and he went out through the double doors that led to the living room. I sat down and

lit a cigarette. I'd been in lots of rooms like this one. We had a room like it in my house, as did most of the kids in my neighborhood.

The carpet was thin and a long time ago there had been a design of roses on it, but they were faded now and it was just gray and dusty. There was a lumpy sofa, two or three overstuffed chairs and heavy, hot looking red drapes. The room had the smell of damp wood and old cooking.

THERE was a picture of the Madonna over the fireplace in a heavy gilt frame and on the mantle was a picture of Marie taken when she was a little kid. The photographer had posed her on a plush-covered bench with one foot tucked underneath her, and she was wearing a short white dress and white shoes and socks.

There wasn't much else in the room. Lamps with big cloth shades, the Sunday papers, and a dictionary on a table near the wall.

He came back in, then, with two water glasses half full. He handed me one and I took a small sip. It was gin, with ginger ale and a few ice cubes. I offered him a cigarette but he shook his head and got out a thick black pipe and a paper pouch of tobacco.

When the pipe was going, he stuck his feet out in front of him and bared his teeth at me. "Pretty good, hey?" he said.

We talked about nothing much for a while, then he opened up and told me about his work. He was an oiler for the Pennsy and had been for twenty-six years. All that time entitled him to Sundays off, but he liked it just as well when his day off was Tuesday. The neighborhood was quiet then, except in the summer when the kids were out of school, and he was able to sleep better.

I didn't say much. I nodded and drank a little from the glass. Mostly I wondered about the call from Alice. Everything hung on that. . . .

Marie came to the doorway and said dinner was ready. The old man and I went out to the table and sat down and she started bringing in the dishes.

There was a roast, gravy, mashed potatoes, fried cabbage and peas. In the middle of the table was a stack of white bread and a plate of butter with the streaked color look of margarine.

The old man took three slices of bread and put them beside his plate and then tucked a napkin under his collar and smoothed it down over his vest. He filled his plate and started eating. Marie brought in a few other things and sat down facing us. It was a round table with a white tablecloth and Marie and I were across from each other, the old man between us on my left.

He ate steadily and loudly, not stopping to ask for anything. He put big slabs of margarine on the bread and then folded the bread in two and used it as a swab to push the food on his fork.

I didn't have any appetite. I was too nervous to eat and the food wasn't the kind I like anyway.

She smiled at me. "You're not eating, Johnny. This must seem plain to you after those fancy restaurants."

"Not on your life. This is fine. But I had kind of a late breakfast."

After dinner there was apple pie with cream on it and coffee.

I drank the coffee. The room was hot but inside I was cold. It took all the nerve I had just to sit there and eat and to smile at the blonde and act like everything was all right. It was three o'clock and there still wasn't any call.

The old man took off the napkin

finally and folded it carefully, then he got up and patted his stomach with both hands and nodded to his daughter.

"Good meal," he said. He ran his tongue around his teeth, looking for some more of it, I guess, then he went into the front room.

She smiled at me. "Pa likes you," she said. "I can tell."

THAT was great. I should jump up and down because some goddam dumb laborer, who did nothing but sleep and stuff food in his face, thought I was all right.

I said, "That's swell. He's a great guy."

She got up and came around to me. We were where the old man couldn't see us from the next room. She leaned over and put her cheek against me.

"Johnny, have you got that surprise for me tonight?"

I covered up pretty well. I hadn't thought of the ring since the night before, but I said, "Sure thing, honey. Just wait and see."

I had no idea where I could get her a ring. Things seemed to be piling and crowding against me and there were so many angles to figure.

"You're sweet, Johnny," she said. She kissed my ear a couple of times, then straightened up and said, "Now you go on in with Pa while I get the dishes done."

I went back to the front room. The old man was standing with his back to the imitation fireplace, picking his teeth with a gold tooth pick attached to one end of his watch chain.

"Like another drink?" he said.

I said fine and he went out and got two more. He came back and handed me mine and put his glass on the mantel and began filling his pipe.

"Marie is a good girl," he said.

"She sure is," I said.

"Good cook," he said. "She'd fatten a man up quick." He glanced at me and grinned a little and I thought he was going to punch the line by telling me I was pretty thin.

We stood there a while, not saying anything. The room was getting on my nerves. The heat and the smell of fried food and the dirty faded wall-paper and the gilt-framed Madonna seemed to be crowding in on me so I could hardly breathe.

He looked at me again and began to chuckle. Then nudged me with his elbow.

"Good girl for making babies," he said.

He threw his head back and laughed, then took his drink off the mantel and sat down, still chuckling.

I sat down, too, and laughed a little, too, wishing to hell he'd shut up. Finally he did. Maybe he figured the job was done and now he could smoke his pipe in peace.

I could hear Marie moving around in the kitchen and the steady puff from the old man's pipe. Those were the only sounds in the house.

I looked at my watch. Three-thirty. It was right then that the phone rang and the noise made me jump. The phone was in the vestibule, and after it rang twice, Marie came through the dining room, running a little and wiping her hands on a cloth.

She went out to the vestibule and I heard her say, "Hello."

I felt tight and cold inside. There was a long silence. The only thing I could hear was the steady puffing of the old boy's pipe. Then I heard Marie say, "Just a minute, please."

She came to the doorway, her face stiff-looking. "It's for you, Johnny."

I GOT up fast and went into the vestibule. It was dark in there and

smelled of raincoats and rubbers. She showed me where the phone was and left me there without a word.

I picked up the receiver. "Yes."

"Johnny? This is Alice."

"How're things?"

"It's all set." I could hear her breathing. She sounded like she'd been running hard.

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. He's leaving for Wisconsin tonight. Alone."

"How about the other angle?"

"He'll be there. Eight-fifteen."

That was it. Everything was ready. My fingers were tight on the receiver. For a while we didn't say any more but I could still hear her breathing.

"Okay then," I said. "I'll see you."

"Where are you, Johnny?"

"At a friend's."

"Who was the girl who answered the phone?"

I was nervous enough without getting into that. "That doesn't matter. I'll see you at eight."

"Wait a minute, Johnny. I can talk a while. He's getting packed. I'm phoning from the drug store. Do you love me, Johnny?"

"Sure."

"You don't sound very enthusiastic. Is your girl friend listening?"

"Now look—"

"All right. I guess you can't talk." Her voice was tough and mean now.

"I love you, baby," I said. I said it as soft as I could and I hated to say it, but I didn't want her getting any funny streaks now when so much was hanging fire.

"I'll see you tonight. I love you, Johnny."

She hung up then and I put back the receiver and went into the living room. The old man was sitting where I'd left him, reading Dick Tracy, and Marie had gone back to the kitchen.

He started to put down the paper, but I said, "Go on with your reading. I've got a call to make. Can I use the phone?"

"Sure, it's okay." He waved his hand like he was giving me a farm. "Use it all you want."

I went back and called a guy by the name of Abe Morelli, who owned a pawn shop on South State Street. I was depending on him to get me a ring. That was important now. The deal was set for tonight and I wanted to cover up, but good. I knew I was going to be in the clear and that Frank was going to hang himself, but I still had that cold feeling. I wanted to be sure of my out.

When Abe answered the phone, I said, "This is Johnny Ford, Abe, I want you to help me get a good diamond engagement ring."

"Sure thing, Johnny. I got some fine ones. How about dropping in tomorrow and taking a look?"

"I got to have this tonight, Abe. By six o'clock, at my hotel."

"Now wait a minute, Johnny. I'm here all alone today. I can't close up and go around delivering jewelry."

"I wouldn't ask if this wasn't important, Abe."

"Well . . . What kind of a ring do you want?"

"A flashy one, Abe. But a damn good one."

It had to be that way. Everybody around town knew the kind of guy I was and it wouldn't have looked right if I was to give a girl a hundred dollar rock.

"I got 'em," he said. "I'll bring it over, Johnny. This is cash, understand?"

"Sure. How much cash?"

"Fifteen hundred."

"Goddamit, I don't want something to go around her neck."

"Diamonds are high now, Johnny. I can let you have one for a grand but it's not as good as this other one."

"Bring it around. About six at my hotel. You know my room number?"

"Yeah. I'll be there."

I HUNG up and went back to the living room. The old man was halfway through Dick Tracy. When Marie came in I told her I thought we ought to be going. She went out to get her hat and I told the old man what a swell time I'd had and he said that was fine and be sure to come again.

It was four o'clock when we reached the car. The kids were off the street and the boy I'd paid half a buck to was gone.

When we pulled away from the curb she snuggled up close to me and put her hand on my knee.

"It was nice of you to come over for dinner," she said. "I know Pa isn't much but he worries about the guys I go out with. He feels better after he's had a look at them."

She drummed her fingers on my knee for a while before she said, "I didn't tell him we're getting married. I thought I'd wait until I can show him the ring."

"You won't have to wait long."

"Oh, Johnny!" She caught my arm tight and put her face against my shoulder and looked up at me with a little smile on her lips.

I drove around for an hour, then back downtown. We got up to my room about five-thirty. She went into the bathroom to put on a new face and I put together a couple of drinks, making hers strong, but mine mostly ice water.

I sat down in the big chair and put her drink on the floor. While I waited I tried to go over everything as carefully as I could, but it didn't help much.

There was too much on my mind and I couldn't lick the tight nervous way I felt.

She came out finally and climbed into my lap and I reached down and got her the drink.

"This will do you good," I said.

"You're all I need," she said. She put her head on my shoulder and snuggled closer under my arm.

"Take it anyway. It will warm you up."

She giggled. "I'm warm enough right now."

But she sat up and sipped the drink. "It's strong," she said, making a face. "Did you put the bottle in it?"

"Are you going to be a woman about it?"

"I can take it," she said. She drank a little more and then tried kissing the tip of my nose. She looked cute with her blonde curls and her mouth painted into a small red bow, but I was too nervous to pay much attention to that. I had to get her tight.

I told her to drink up, and when she did I got up and filled her glass.

"Are you trying to get me tight?"

"Maybe. It'd be fun to see how you'd act."

"I might surprise you."

"I like surprises."

She smiled at me and tilted the glass again. She was being coy now, but letting me know any play I made would be all right with her. I pulled her closer.

"You're pretty cute. A guy could get a lot of ideas around you."

"There's nothing wrong with ideas," she said, and laughed.

We sat there, kissing every now and then while she finished the second drink. After a while it began to get to her. She put her head on my shoulder and closed her eyes. Every time I kissed her she would open her eyes drowsily

and smile at me.

There was a knock at the door about six o'clock and I knew it was Abe. Marie sat up and pushed the hair away from her forehead and gave me a scared look.

"Who's that?" she whispered.

"The surprise, honey," I said. While I was on my way to the door, she smoothed her skirt and sat primly in the chair, looking guilty.

It was Abe, all right. He stood there, a little dark guy in sloppy clothes.

"How's the keed, Johnny?" he said.

"Fine. You got it?"

"Sure, sure."

I opened the door enough so that he could see the blonde sitting in the chair.

"Swell, I'd like to ask you in for a drink, but you know how it is."

"Sure," he said. "This ain't a social call. I don't drink anyway." He had a lot of dignity for a little guy. He took a package from his pocket and gave it to me. "That's an even grand, Johnny."

I TOOK the package, which was about the size of a big ice cube, and dropped it into my pocket. When I started counting out the money, he said, "Don't you want to look at what you're buying?"

"Hell, I trust you, Abe."

"Okay," he said.

I gave him a thousand dollars . . . and it hurt. I had two hundred bucks left and about a thousand in the bank. I didn't mind spending the money, but I hated to be short. Money was the one thing that made me feel sure of myself. Bell hops and head waiters and lots of other people always had a big smile for me, but not because I was a good guy who never got caught beating his mother. It's that ready green stuff that makes friends out of everybody.

Abe counted the money and put it

in his pocket.

"Good luck, Johnny."

"Thanks. Let me know if I can help you out some time."

"Sure thing, keed," he said, and walked away down the corridor. I closed the door and took the package out of my pocket. I looked down at the blonde and tossed the package up and down in my hand.

"Want to open this up while I make a drink?"

She was like a kid with a little red wagon when I flipped that cube into her lap. I made a couple of drinks, then sat on the arm of the chair while she tore the paper off with fingers that trembled.

It was a nice ring. It was big as a headlight, with a few chips set around the stone in a square pattern. The thing was too big for a thousand bucks unless it had some flaws in it and I suppose it had them. I didn't care. It looked flashy and expensive and it was the kind of ring people would expect me to give a girl.

She looked at it like she couldn't believe her eyes. Then she put her head against my arm and started to cry.

"It's so beautiful, Johnny. I never thought any guy would want to give me a ring like this."

"It's nothing to cry about," I said. "See if it fits."

She tried it on and it was all right. A little big, because she had awfully small hands, but that didn't make any difference to her.

I patted her on the shoulder and handed her the drink.

"Let's drink to us," I said.

She took the drink and sipped it but she kept looking at the ring. I took a look at my watch. I had to be out there at eight and it was six-fifteen now. I had plenty of time, but the waiting was getting on my nerves.

She smiled at me then, a funny little smile, and got up and went over to the bed. She walked carefully, but once she almost stumbled. The liquor was working.

WHEN she got to the bed she looked back at me with the same funny smile and then she stretched out and put her hands behind her head.

"Sleepy?" I said.

I went over and sat on the edge of the bed.

"It's nice being here alone with you," she said. "This is the first time we've ever been really alone. There's always been a crowd around, or a floor show, or something like that. We couldn't even talk before."

I grinned. "You want to talk?"

"I guess not," she said. She gave a sigh and twisted around a little on the bed. "I guess I just want to be with you."

I bent over and kissed her and she put her arms around my neck and pulled me down close. "Oh, Johnny," she whispered. "I never knew there were guys like you in the world."

I didn't want things to go too far. I didn't feel like it for one thing: I was too tight and nervous, and I wanted her drunk so she'd go to sleep. I didn't want to do anything to keep her awake.

I sat up and she let her arms drop back beside her.

"I'll get us a drink," I said. "Then I got a little bad news for you."

When I brought her drink she got up on one elbow, her expression worried. "What kind of bad news, Johnny?"

"Not too bad," I said. "But something came up this afternoon I've got to handle. It'll take about an hour. Will you mind waiting until I get back?"

"It's all right, Johnny. When do you have to go?"

"About seven-thirty."

"Is it that girl who called you at my house?"

"Well . . . that's how I got the news."

"Who is she, Johnny?"

"Just a girl. Nobody you'd know."

I tried to make it sound right but it wasn't easy. I was talking about Alice. "She's a guy's secretary. She just gave me a message is all."

I coaxed her into finishing her drink and by that time she was pretty tight. I was putting double shots in her drinks and she'd had enough to make anybody foggy.

About seven she went to sleep. I went into the bathroom and shaved in a hurry and got into a clean shirt. My fingers were shaking while I buttoned it and I couldn't shake the idea that something was going wrong. I hadn't been drinking enough to matter and I needed one bad. I wanted to be sharp, but not with the kind of sharpness that comes from booze.

By the time I finished dressing, it was seven-thirty. Time for me to go. I took a look at the blonde. She was sleeping like a baby. She had turned on one side and drawn up her legs so she looked even smaller. Her blonde hair was spread over the pillow and the little red bow of lipstick on her mouth made her look almost too young. She was out for the count.

I turned out the lights, locked the door from the outside and went on downstairs.

CHAPTER VIII

I HADN'T put the car in the garage so I went around to Madison Street where it was parked and drove out North. It wasn't quite dark yet and it was cool and nice.

I tried to stop thinking. I tried to make the tight cold feeling inside me go

away, but when you start thinking about murder I guess that feeling goes along with it, and stays with you.

It was just a little before eight when I pulled up in front of the apartment on Winthrop. I went into the vestibule and rang the bell and when I reached the steps to the second floor landing Frank was standing there. He was wearing a blue suit and he had a clean shave. His red hair was damp with water and slicked down and he looked just like what he was; a big Irishman wearing a cheap suit and ready to go away to do some fishing.

He said, "Well you're right on time."

"Sure. You all set to leave?"

"Yeah, I'm all set," he said. "Come on in. I got a few things to do yet, but it won't take me more than a minute."

I followed him into the front room. His suitcase was in the middle of the floor. Alice was sitting in one of the big chairs.

"Hello, Johnny," she said.

"What's all this?" I looked at Frank and then back at her with a lot of surprise on my face. "Aren't you coming along?"

"No, she's not going," Frank said. He looked at her and his expression was stubborn and angry.

"Well, how come?"

She put the magazine down in her lap and said, "I've got some work at the office to take care of. It came up at the last minute and I simply couldn't get away. I'm taking the noon train tomorrow."

"You could have told them to go to hell," Frank said. He was still looking at her and his face was flushed.

Alice looked up at him and I thought she was going to rip wide open. She looked cold and hard. She didn't have any make-up on except a smear of bright lipstick and it made her skin look white and drawn. Everything about her

looked pulled in tight.

"There's no point in going over all that again," she said. "I'm coming up tomorrow. That's only one day."

"That's not it," he said stubbornly. "You think more about the people down at your office than you do of me."

I knew they'd been having a bad time. There was something between them that was close to hate right now.

"Well," I said. "It's eight o'clock now. Too bad about Alice, but if we're going to catch that train we'd better hurry."

He looked at her for another few seconds and then he let out his breath and said, "All right. I've got a few things to pack. I'll get at it."

He went out of the room and Alice looked after him without any expression on her face. She tossed the magazine on the floor and made a gesture of cutting her throat.

"Animal!" She said it soundlessly.

I gave her a sign to let up on that, then went closer to her.

She put a cigarette in her mouth and I struck a match. When I leaned over her I said, "Everything all set?"

She nodded slowly and looked up at me with her eyes shining. She was ready for this thing. She couldn't wait. There didn't seem to be any fear or nerves in her body. She was like a spring wound to the breaking point, ready to snap and lash out at any second.

WE DIDN'T talk anymore. I still had that tight cold feeling inside. It was almost eight by now and I knew Lesser was due at eight-fifteen. I wanted to get the hell out.

Frank came back then carrying a tooth brush, a comb and a jar of shaving cream. We put them in and closed the grip.

I moved to the door. "All set?"

"Yeah." He was standing now, looking at Alice. "I'll see you tomorrow night," he said.

"All right," she said.

"Be sure and make that train," he said. "I'll be waiting."

"All right."

He went over to her, a little uncertainly. When he bent to kiss her on the mouth she turned her head just enough so that his lips touched her cheek.

"Good-by," he said.

She picked up the magazine from the floor and went looking through it while he was going to the door. "Goodby," she said. She wasn't acting then. She hated him and he should have seen it.

He pulled the door closed and went downstairs to the car. He put the suitcase in back and climbed in front next to me. I drove over to Sheridan Road, and we didn't say anything until we passed the Edgewater Beach. He just sat there staring straight ahead.

I was wondering how I was going to start my end of the deal.

He made it easier by saying in a tired, discouraged voice, "You see how it is, Johnny? Right when we seem to be getting along all right she pulls a deal like this. She could have come along tonight if she wanted to."

"I wouldn't let it worry you," I said. I turned at Foster and headed for the Outer Drive. "She'll be up tomorrow, won't she?"

"That not the idea. She could have come tonight."

I didn't say anything for a block or two. I was tense and cold. My hands on the wheel were slick with sweat. This was the big moment and I was almost afraid of it, because once I opened my mouth there wouldn't be any turning back.

"Yeah," I said, keeping my voice as casual as I could make it. "It's too bad Lesser couldn't have picked an-

other night for the work."

There it was and I could tell from the way he stiffened that I had socked it in hard. He didn't say anything, but he was looking at me, and from the corner of my eye I saw his hand clench until the knuckles were white.

I fished out my cigarettes and held the pack toward him.

"Smoke?"

"What do you mean?" he said slowly.

I stared at him surprised. "About what?"

"About what you said. About Lesser and Alice working tonight."

I let him know I was puzzled. "Well what about it? That's why she didn't come home with you tonight, isn't it?"

"Pull off and park somewhere," he said.

"What the hell—"

"Goddammit, you heard me!"

"Are you out of your head, Frank? We only got about twenty minutes to make that train."

"To hell with the train!" He caught my arm and squeezed until I almost yelled. "You hear me?"

"All right, all right," I said. "But I wish you'd let me in on what's going on."

He didn't say another word. He just sat there staring straight ahead.

I turned off at Belmont and went down a side street until I found a parking place. I cut the ignition and he turned and looked at me.

"Now give it to me, quick and straight," he said.

I SAID, "Frank, I met Lesser the other day and he said he was going to see Alice tonight. About some work, I thought. I knew you and Alice were going to Wisconsin and I figured he just had the dates mixed up, or something. Tonight, when Alice said she wasn't going up until tomorrow, I just

figured she had to see him and get the work out of the way. I just thought it was tough he couldn't have picked some other time. But you know all that. You were talking to her about it while I was there."

His face looked mean now. "Sure I knew all about it," he said. "But not that way. The story I got was that she had to do some work at the office tomorrow morning." He smiled without humor. "Nothing was said about Lesser coming over at night. I guess that's when they've been doing most of their work."

"Now wait a minute," I said. "I feel like hell, Frank. I don't want to cause trouble between you and Alice. I should have kept my big yap shut."

"That doesn't matter," he said harshly. "I'd have found out from somebody. Take me back there."

"Don't go off half-cocked on this thing. I'll take you back but think what you're doing first."

"Take me back," was all he said.

I started the car and drove around the corner and headed north on the Drive. The tight cold feeling was still with me but the nervousness was gone. The thing had started now, and it was out of my hands.

When we passed the Edgewater Beach Hotel going back, I said, "Now listen Frank. Maybe I got things mixed up. Maybe Lesser did say he was seeing her tomorrow morning instead of tonight. Hell, I wasn't paying much attention. Why don't you wait out front and see if he shows? If he doesn't, then I was wrong. And Alice won't ever know you came sneaking back like this."

He didn't answer. When I got to Bryn Mawr, I turned off Sheridan Road and went down her street. I parked on the opposite side of the street where we had a good view of the

building.

Her apartment was dark. The dashboard clock said eight-fourteen.

We sat there in the dark for about a minute. He looked up at the windows and said. "What time was he supposed to be here?"

"I don't know. I don't know any more than I've told you already."

Another minute passed. There wasn't much traffic on the street. A couple of cars went by and each one made me break out in sweat.

Finally a car slowed down at the corner and angled over to the curb in front of the building. It was a green Chevrolet. The driver cut the motor and the lights, climbed out of the car and slammed the door.

We watched him as he went up the walk to the entrance. He was small and about all we could see was the back of his head and the neat, brown gabardine suit he was wearing.

"Is that him?" Frank said quietly.

"I can't tell."

It was Lesser, all right. I could see enough to tell me that. When he went into the vestibule, I could see his black hair shining in the light. He punched a bell and stood there until he got a buzzer and pulled open the door and went up the steps.

I looked up at Alice's windows. Frank was looking up there, too. When the light snapped on in her apartment he said something under his breath, short and dirty.

He glanced at me and looked like hell. He tried to swallow but couldn't make it. He rubbed both hands over his face. "Johnny, take me where I can get a drink, will you?"

I hadn't figured that. I figured he'd go right in after Lesser.

I said, "Sure, but—" I let it hang there.

He was looking up at Alice's win-

dows again. She came over to them and we could see her shadow as she started pulling down the shades.

"Still want that drink?" I said.

"I got to think. Get me out of here," he said.

THERE wasn't anything to do but drive to the nearest bar. We went inside and ordered beers and he picked up a nickel from the change and walked back toward the telephone booth.

I sat there wondering what the hell to do and how I could have figured everything so wrong. Everything had worked perfectly up to where he had just taken a good long look and done nothing.

He came back after a while. When I saw his face I stopped worrying about the plan not working. I've seen guys throw all their money on a horse and steal more to throw after it, and when they lose I've seen how they react. I've seen guys when they find out they double-crossed the wrong people and the heat is on, and I know how they react. Desperate, wild, ready to blow apart any minute.

That's the way Frank looked.

He sat down and pushed away the beer and ordered a straight rye. All the time he was waiting for it his big hands were twisting around like they had hold of something they hated and were trying to rip it to pieces.

"I talked to her," he said softly. He drank his drink and his hands started working again. "She said she was alone. Said she got out of bed to answer the phone." He looked straight at me and his face began to twist as if something was hurting him inside. "She lied, Johnny. You saw that guy go up to her apartment. You saw her when she pulled the shades down." His voice went up a little. "You saw that, didn't you Johnny?"

"Yeah, I saw it."

He stood up and closed his hands once or twice before he said, "I got to go, Johnny." I don't think he saw me. His eyes were like marble. What he was thinking made them cold and glassy.

He went out the door and I waited about twenty seconds then followed him out to the street. It was dark by this time but I could see him walking fast toward her place. He only had a block and a half to go.

My car was on the other side of the street and I started for it but right then something made me change my mind. Everything was set to blow wide open, just like we'd planned, and I should have gotten the hell out of the way.

But I didn't. Don't ask me why. It was crazy and dangerous but I started after him, using the other side of the street.

I had to be there and know for sure it would work.

There weren't many people on the streets. I passed a young couple but they were too busy with each other to notice me. The street was pretty dark but I could see him whenever he passed a street light. His shoulders were hunched up and he was hurrying.

I stopped across the street from her building. The lights were on in her apartment and the shades were still drawn. I saw Frank go up to the entrance and fumble in his pocket for the keys. He opened the door in the vestibule and I saw his thick back disappear up the stairs.

My heart was pounding so hard it hurt. This was the last step. Everything else had worked perfectly and now this last thing had to work out my way.

I was pulled up tight inside. My stomach, my muscles, my nerves all

seemed to be straining, and I knew that every part of me was waiting for the sound of a shot.

WHEN that shot sounded I was going back to my car and get back to the blonde in my room.

A minute or two passed. Maybe it was more. Time gets confused when you're waiting for something to explode and there's no clock in the world that can measure it.

Then I saw Frank again. I saw his legs coming down the inner stairs, then the light in the hall shining on his red head. He came down the walk, his big shoulders hunched queerly, and he seemed to be staring at the ground. He turned right and went up the street, walking stiff-legged.

I stayed where I was for a minute, then went across to the street door of the building and stopped inside the small, tile-floored vestibule. There wasn't a sound anywhere. All I could hear was my heart. This wasn't part of my plan. I wasn't supposed to be here. I was supposed to be with my blonde. But Alice and Lesser were upstairs and there hadn't been any shot. I was going to blow wide open unless I knew what had happened up there.

I rang her bell twice but there was no answer. I rang it again, holding my finger against the button. From above I could hear the bell ringing faintly, but there was no answering buzz at the door. I kept pushing the button while the sweat gathered under my arms and ran down my sides.

I made up my mind fast. I jabbed the first floor button, and when the buzzer sounded, I jerked the door open and went up the steps three at a time.

I was part way up the second flight when a door opened in the hall below. I froze.

A woman's voice said, "Who is it?"

There was a minute of silence and then she said angrily. "Must be them kids," and then I heard the door slam.

I waited a few seconds more, then went on up the steps. The door of her apartment was open, the light shining through onto the landing.

I went inside and walked into the living room. Lesser was flat on the floor, groaning a little, and there was blood on his lips and a blue bruise under his right eye.

Alice was sitting on the floor, her back propped against the sofa. She was out cold. There was a red mark along her jaw, the kind of a mark that follows a slap in the face.

One of her slippers had fallen off and the house coat had opened up the middle and her right leg was doubled back under her. The other was stretched out straight. Her hair was hanging over her forehead and when he'd hit her the lipstick had smeared over her chin. She looked like hell.

He was just as bad. He was a little guy, with fancy clothes, and his lips were broken and puffy and the mouse under his eye would be king-sized in an hour or so.

I looked around. His coat was hanging over the back of a chair and there were a couple of drinks on the coffee table.

There wasn't any mystery about what had happened. Frank had walked in on them, just as Alice and I had planned. But instead of going for the gun, he'd taken a swing at both of them and walked out.

The thing we'd planned had gone to pieces and all the worry and fear and hope was for nothing.

And right then it hit me. All at once I had it. I didn't have to think about it, or figure out details.

I went over and closed the front door very quietly; then I went into the bed-

room and started rummaging through the drawers. I scattered his shirts and socks around and dug through her stuff but I didn't find what I wanted.

I went on looking anyway, starting to sweat by this time. This had to be done right away or it couldn't be done at all. I went through the closet and a little desk next to the dresser before I tried the small table next to the bed. I pulled out the drawer and there was the gun, shining and compact.

IT WAS of German make. Alice had mentioned it, saying he had brought it back as a souvenir. I checked the clip and saw that it was loaded. I slipped off the safety and went back into the front room.

The clock on the mantel said eighty-two-nine. Frank hadn't been gone more than two minutes. That was close enough to fix him.

Lesser was moaning a little now and starting to roll his head back and forth. Alice was still out, the smeared lipstick like blood against the whiteness of her skin.

There wasn't any time to think about what I was going to do. Maybe that was a good thing.

I raised the gun, pointed it at Lesser's head and pulled the trigger twice. The gun made a lot of noise in the room. He started kicking when the bullet hit him, but that didn't last long.

I took a handkerchief from my breast pocket and wiped the gun carefully. Then I tossed it on the floor and went quickly toward the back door.

There was a little porch outside the kitchen door with stairs leading to the back yard. I went down them as fast as I could. I wasn't feeling anything right then. I just wanted to get away.

The yard was dark and I had to go slow in finding my way to the alley, but when I got there I ran the whole

length of the block and came out on a cross street not far from where I'd parked the car.

I went past Alice's place, walking on the opposite side of the street and on to my car. Once I looked over my shoulder up at the second floor and it looked like some more lights had come on in the houses on either side.

No one was near my car when I got in and I didn't waste any time getting away. I turned right at the first corner so I wouldn't have to pass her place and then got over onto Sheridan Road and headed for the Loop.

By the time I had gone a block the car was doing fifty. I knew that was wrong. I eased down to twenty-five and held it there. The night had gotten colder and I could feel little chills going over me. I ran the windows up but that didn't help. I was still cold.

I didn't think about what I'd done. I just kept my eyes on the road and my mind on driving the car. The dashboard clock said eight-forty. When I got downtown it was almost nine o'clock.

I parked the car on a side street and went into the hotel. The lobby was full of people and there were half a dozen people waiting for elevators.

On my way into the elevator I stuck behind a couple of guys so the operator wouldn't notice me. Even if he had he was pretty busy and it wasn't likely he'd remember the time.

The time was important. I had to have an alibi for eight-thirty. That was when I'd shot Lesser and I had to be able to prove I was somewhere else at that time, if anything went wrong. The way I figured, they'd grab Frank for it and he wouldn't have a chance. But if there was some angle I had missed I had to be in the clear.

When I opened the door of my room the blonde looked up from the chair

where she was reading a magazine. She looked sleepy and sullen.

"Well, it's about time," she said. "I thought you said an hour."

I could feel the tightness coming back. I closed the door, trying to keep anything from showing. "That's right," I said. "Was I longer than that?"

"It seems like I been waiting a year," she said. "I woke up right after you left, I guess."

"I'm sorry. I was a little longer than I thought. It must be eight-thirty by now."

"Eight-thirty? It's closer to nine-thirty if you ask me."

I FELT my fingers starting to shake. This had to be fixed or it was going to mean trouble. "You're way off," I said. I smiled and tried to sound like it didn't mean anything. "Matter of fact I saw a clock in the lobby. I think it was about eight-thirty-five."

"The clock is crazy."

"Well, let's don't argue about it," I said. I went over and started mixing a couple of drinks. I made mine stiff and all the while my mind was twisting around and doubling back on itself, trying to figure some way to fix it so she'd alibi me for the time.

I gave her the drink and bent over and kissed her. "Don't be mad, baby," I said. An idea was in my head. It was chancey, but I had to use it. "Go put a new face on and you'll feel better."

"I'm not mad, Johnny. But gosh, it seemed a long time waiting for you."

"All right. We won't talk about it any more."

She got up unsteadily and went into the bathroom and closed the door.

I went over and picked up the phone. When the hotel operator answered I kept my voice low and said. "Look will you find out for me what time the play at the Selwyn opens? I got tick-

ets for tomorrow night and I want to be on time. It's either eight-thirty or twenty of nine, but I want to be sure."

She said, "All right, Mr. Ford. I'll let you know right away."

I put the phone back and sat on the edge of the bed and lit a cigarette. A minute or two passed. I tried to keep cool. This wouldn't work unless the blonde were there with me when the operator called back. I wondered what was keeping her.

"Hey," I called, "what's the delay?"

"Just a minute."

The phone rang then and I swore under my breath. I let it ring a second time while I kept watching the bathroom door. It started the third ring when the blonde opened the door and came out.

"The phone's ringing," she said.

"Come here," I said. I picked up the receiver, then put my arm around Marie's waist and pulled her down beside me.

"What time is it?" I said into the phone.

"It's eight-thirty, Mr. Ford."

"What?"

I shoved the receiver against the blonde's ear and I could hear the operator say again, in a clear voice, "It's eight-thirty, Mr. Ford."

I took the phone back, said thanks, and hung up. I turned and smiled at the blonde. "Did you hear that? Now aren't you ashamed of yourself for raising hell with me?"

"She said it was eight-thirty, didn't she?"

"That's right."

She gave me a funny look, then snuggled herself closer to me. "What difference does it make? You're here now."

Everything else faded away. I knew I'd let myself in for trouble. I knew there was a lot to fix before everything

was the way I wanted. But right now I wanted the blonde. For some reason the worse mess a guy is in the more he needs a woman.

I stretched out and pulled her down beside me and kissed her a few times. She had her eyes closed and the tight little blonde curls made her like a baby. I wanted her and it wasn't because of anything she did to me but just because of the way I felt.

CHAPTER IX

I GAVE her cab fare about one o'clock and sent her home. After that I couldn't sleep until I'd taken three stiff drinks. They must have numbed me because I didn't even dream. . . .

The next morning I woke up with the feeling that something heavy was hanging over me. When I started thinking I knew what it was. I sent down for some coffee and the morning papers.

It was about eleven-thirty then. Everything would be in the papers. I put on a bathrobe and walked up and down the room. A lot had happened since I left Alice's. Maybe it all happened the way I had it figured; but it might have gone wrong.

The bellboy who brought up the coffee was Junior, the sharpie with slick blonde hair and eyes like marbles.

"Gee, Mr. Ford," he said, "that horse you gave me came in. Blue Angel, I mean."

He pushed the tray over to the window. The two morning papers were folded neatly along side the silver coffee urn.

"Good for him," I said. "What'd he pay?"

"Ten to one. I made ten bucks. That's easier money than hopping bells."

I sat down and poured myself a cup

of coffee. My left hand moved over and touched the papers but I didn't pick them up.

He was standing behind me and he said, "You haven't got anything else for me, have you?"

"No," I said. "I don't know what's good today."

"Couldn't you kind of make a guess?"

"Get out," I said. I stood up and turned around. "Will you get out of here?"

He backed toward the door, looking white and scared.

"Sure, Mr. Ford. I'm sorry I bothered you."

He closed the door behind him and I sat down again. I was shaking all over. I picked the papers up and spread them out.

He was on the front page all right. There was a picture of him and one of Alice and a shot of Lesser in her apartment with blood on his face.

I read the stories in both papers, then put them down and poured myself another cup of coffee. A little of the tight feeling was gone and my hands were steadier.

Everything looked all right. The stories had it that Frank Olsen, a recently discharged veteran, had come home unexpectedly and found a man with his wife. There had been a fight and the husband walked out, leaving the other man with two bullet holes in his head. Some neighbors had heard the shot and phoned the police. When they arrived they found Lesser dead and the wife just regaining consciousness.

They sent out an alarm for the husband immediately and a squad picked him up walking north on Sheridan Road near Howard Street.

He claimed he hadn't shot the man but from the tone of the stories it was obvious the papers and the police were convinced he had. The police had ques-

tioned him last night and they had questioned his wife.

That was about all there was in the stories. I lit a cigarette and sat there a long time just thinking. I looked all right, but I had the funny feeling that I was too far away from the center of things. Here I was, sitting in a hotel room while coppers were asking him and her questions and another bunch of coppers were out in her neighborhood talking to people, snooping around, checking prints and digging into everything they could find.

IT HAD all happened so fast that I hadn't made any plans. I was pretty sure I hadn't left anything that would lead to me but I couldn't be sure.

I went back to the papers. There was a story by a feature writer on GI wives who cheated while their husbands were away. There was another about the gun. It was a German P-38 and the story made quite a point about the husband bringing it back from Nazi Germany to defend his wife's honor.

I had enough of that. I tossed the papers in the waste basket and went into the bathroom and washed up and shaved. After that I tried to do some work but I couldn't. The idea of calling up chumps to see if they wanted any horses seemed pretty silly right then.

About that time the blonde called. She was downstairs working and she wanted to know how I was after last night. I told her I was fine. She giggled and said she thought I'd be pretty tired. I felt nervous and irritated. What the hell, did she think a night with her was like playing quarterback against the Bears?

"How about tonight?" she said.

"Can't make it," I said. "I'll give you a ring."

She didn't say anything for a minute.

Then she said, "I'll bet it's one of your girls you got to see." She laughed as if she were kidding but it didn't sound that way.

"This is business, honey," I said. There wasn't any reason why I couldn't see her. I just didn't want to. I didn't want to make any plans until I saw how things were going.

"Are you going to be busy all night?" she said.

"Yes. For God's sake I told you that once." I snapped the words at her. I was tense and nervous. Right then I realized how important she might be if anything went wrong and I knew I was acting like a damn fool.

"You know I want to see you, honey. You must know that," I said. "But this deal for tonight has been set for a long time. How about tomorrow night?"

"That's swell, Johnny," she sounded a little better.

"Fine," I said. "I'll pick you up at your house. Around eight?"

She said okay and then said a few silly things about loving me a lot and finally she hung up and I went back to walking around the room.

I knew there was one thing that might cause trouble. If Frank came up with an alibi for the time of the shooting that would start the cops looking for someone else. Someone might have seen him down the street when the shot was fired. That would clear him completely.

Someone might have seen me go into the apartment after Frank left. Someone could have seen me running down the back way after the shot was fired.

That's the angle you can't figure. You never know who's looking. There's always some old woman sitting up with a bad stomach or some babe looking out at the moon. You don't see them, you think you're in the clear but they might have been watching all the time.

But I had an out if anything broke on this deal. The shot was fired at eight-thirty and I had the blonde ready to get up on the stand and swear I was with her at eight-thirty.

THE phone rang again. I picked it up and said, "Johnny." It was Alice. "Where are you?" I said. I felt the tightness coming back.

"At the drug store. You've seen the papers, haven't you?"

"Yeah. What's happening?"

"I was down at the station last night. Most of this morning, too. They've been asking me so many questions I'm simply groggy."

"What about?"

"Lesser mostly. Frank says he didn't do it, you know."

"That's what I read. What do the cops think?"

"I'm not sure. They seem convinced he did it, but they haven't arraigned him yet."

"Has he got a lawyer?"

"No"

"Okay, I'll get him one."

"Johnny—will that be wise?"

"Of course," I said. "I'm afraid of him. And I want to know what's going on, too."

"All right." She sounded tired. "When can I see you, Johnny?"

"Hang on now, baby. That's out."

She didn't say anything for a while. Then she said, "I didn't know it going to be like this," and her voice was weary and discouraged.

"We've talked enough," I said. "And get this, baby, from now on watch the way you use a phone. Any phone. Better let me call you from now on."

"Couldn't I see you tonight, Johnny? I need to talk to you. I feel I'll go insane if I don't see you."

"Stop that," I said as sharp as I could. "I'll try and arrange to see you.

But we've got to be careful. Got that?"

"All right, Johnny."

She hung up and I stood there sweating. All we had to do was sit tight and we had this thing licked. But she wasn't going to sit tight very long. She was nervous and if she didn't see me it would make her worse.

I called a guy then by the name of Sam Marshall, one of the syndicate lawyers. When I got him I said, "Marshall, this is Johnny Ford. I want you to help out a pal of mine. Did you see the morning papers about this veteran shooting the guy his wife was playing around with?"

"I noticed the headlines," he said.

"That seems to be a veteran's occupational disease. What about it?"

"That guy's a friend of mine. He's in a spot and I'd like you to do what you can for him."

"You're asking me to handle this case?"

"That's it."

He was quiet a while. Then he said, "I'm pretty busy right now, Johnny. You understand, too, that I don't handle charity cases."

"I don't go around looking for hand-outs either," I said. "How much do you want?"

"Don't get sore." He laughed. "I'll look into it and let you know. Has he been arraigned yet?"

"According to the papers, no."

"He'll be at Eleventh and State then. I'll call up the boys and see what's doing. When I get some information I'll call you back."

"Okay," I said.

There wasn't anything more I could do. Things seemed to be going all right. I wasn't sure I was making a smart move in hiring a lawyer for him, because some copper might wonder what my angle was. But I wanted to be close to developments. Marshall could

keep me posted on what was happening from the inside.

I SAT around the room the rest of the afternoon smoking one cigarette after another and drinking. About five Marshall called me back.

"I've got an appointment to see him tomorrow morning," he said. "The State's Attorney is annoyed because he won't sign a confession. They're going to arraign him tomorrow morning first thing on a first degree murder charge. They seem to think they've got a strong enough circumstantial case without a confession."

"What do you think?" I said.

"I don't know much about it yet," he said. "All I know is that he claims he hit this fellow Lesser a couple of times and then slapped his wife and walked out. But at about the same time the neighbors heard a shot and when the police arrived Lesser had two holes in his head. What would you think?"

"Maybe he did it," I said. "But I still want you to do what you can. Look, can you fix it so I can see him tomorrow when you go over there?"

"I imagine so. The sheriff will take him in custody after he's arraigned. He'll be taken to the county jail. Can you meet me out there about eleven o'clock?"

"Sure thing," I said.

"See you then," he said.

He hadn't mentioned money but I knew he didn't work for peanuts. I didn't have much dough, but I could raise enough to take care of him. I just had to, that was all.

The rest of the night was hell. I almost went nuts thinking about all the things that might be happening. I go through it by making a drink every time I got thinking too much and I guess I finally just passed out on the bed.

The next morning I felt terrible but I was meeting Marshall so I shaved and dressed carefully. After that I went downstairs and got a large glass of tomato juice with Wooster Sauce in it and drank two cups of black coffee. I didn't go into the lobby restaurant because I wasn't in any mood to see the blonde.

The county jail is behind the Criminal Courts building at Twenty-Sixth and California. I went out there in a cab. The building is dirty looking, but it's a jail so it probably wouldn't look any better clean.

I went up to the warden's office and told a guy there what I wanted and he told me to wait in the reception room. Marshall hadn't been around yet, but the guy told me that Frank had just been brought in before the Grand Jury next door in the Courts building.

I waited about ten minutes before Marshall walked in, looking like a politician. He was a big guy, with slick dark hair and he was wearing a grey flannel suit with a silk shirt and a bright bow tie. He came over and shook hands with me and we talked about nothing much for a while.

Then he said: "I'll go in and get things arranged. It shouldn't take long."

"Fine," I said.

Marshall went into the warden's office and I thought that over. It would be great if Frank got sprung! Just great. Everything we'd done shot right in the can. But I didn't worry too much about that. If they indicted him for murder they'd work for a conviction. And they'd work hard. The chances were against him going to the chair, but he'd do a stretch. That was my guess.

I lit another cigarette. While I was waiting a city detective, a guy by the name of Harrigan, walked into the

room. He nodded at me and came over and sat down.

"What's up, Johnny? Sins finally caught up with you?"

"That'll be the day. No a friend of mine got himself in some trouble. I brought him down a lawyer, that's all."

HARRIGAN nodded his head and took a crumpled pack of Camels from his pocket, struck a match on the sole of his shoe and lit a cigarette. When he'd added some smoke to mine he stretched out his legs and settled back in the chair with a grunt.

"What kind of trouble?" he said.

"You must have read about it. He's this guy Olsen that shot up a guy he caught with his wife."

"Oh, him. Yeah, I was up with him most of the night. We just got an indictment against him for first degree murder. He seems like a pretty nice guy though." He looked over at me, squinting through the smoke. "How well do you know him?"

"Pretty well. I knew him before he went into the army."

"Know his wife?"

"Yeah. Do you think he's going up for this?"

"Hard to tell. I was up with him until three-thirty and he didn't talk. The chief wanted a confession and we thought we'd get one. But he stuck to his story. It's a funny case." He took another drag from his cigarette and blinked. "Dammit I'm tired," he said.

I knew it might be a bad time to ask questions but I had to know what he meant.

"How do you mean, it's a funny case?" I said.

"It's just funny, that's all," he said. He didn't open his eyes and he looked like he might go to sleep any minute. "There's a few angles that aren't right, but I imagine they'll iron out

eventually. A confession will take care of everything."

"Do you think you'll get it?" I said.

"Probably. Who'd you say his lawyer is?"

"I didn't, but it's Sam Marshall."

He nodded. "Sam comes high, doesn't he?"

"He's just doing me a favor," I said.

"I see. You were with Olsen last night, weren't you, Johnny?"

That had to come and it didn't mean anything. Frank would have told them that last night with the rest of the story.

"That's right," I said. "I was going to drive him and his wife down to the train. She didn't come so he and I went alone. I guess he told you all of that."

HE NODDED. "We'll want you for a statement one of these days, I guess, but there's no hurry. He told us all that, but he didn't say anything about shooting this guy. That's the trouble."

He stood up then and yawned widely.

"I'm going home and get some sleep. See you around."

"Yeah, take it easy."

He went out the door and I wondered how much of that yawning had been on the level. Harrigan I knew was a tough smart copper. I didn't like him working on this case.

Marshall came out of the warden's office about five minutes later and told me that everything was set. We followed a uniformed cop down a corridor to a big bare room with just a few chairs in it and a steel grillwork that went from the floor to the ceiling and divided the room in two. We sat down in straight-backed wooden chairs close to the grillwork and a little later Frank came in through a door on the other

side of the room.

There was a guard with him, a middle-aged guy in a uniform and he went over and stood in a corner and looked at something on the ceiling.

Frank blinked a little and then when he saw us he walked over to his side of the grillwork and sat down. His hair was mussed and his eyes looked like he'd been crying.

He looked from Marshall to me and he tried to smile.

"Hi, Johnny," he said.

I said, "Hi, Frank."

"They told me there was somebody to see me," he said. "I couldn't figure out who it would be."

Marshall cleared his throat. "Olsen we don't have too much time. I've been retained by Johnny to act as your lawyer. Is that agreeable with you?"

Frank looked at him and nodded slowly.

"I guess it is. I guess I need a lawyer."

"We'll consider that settled then," Marshall said. "Now just let me ask you a few questions. Did you kill this man Lesser?"

Frank leaned forward and grabbed the bars of the grillwork with both hands. "God, no. I been telling the cops that all night but they don't believe me."

"All right, tell us what happened last night."

"Well, I went home and found this guy with my wife. I lost my head, I guess. I remember hitting him a few times and then Alice—that's my wife—was grabbing at my arm and I hit her, too. After that I just left and started walking."

Marshall said, "The man was dead when the police got there. He had two bullets in his head. They were fired from a gun you brought home from overseas. You know all that, I pre-

sume?"

"The cops told me all that, but I didn't do it." He looked from Marshall to me and then back at him again and his eyes looked wild. "I didn't do it," he repeated.

"Olsen," Marshall said. "Understand me. I'm not interested in the aspects of your innocence or guilt. If you had killed this man I would be inclined to say you had sufficient provocation. However, that's not my job. My concern is how your story will sound to a jury. Now tell me what time you walked in on your wife and this man Lesser, and as nearly as possible what happened."

Frank looked at me. "I don't know what time exactly. What time did I leave you, Johnny?"

"About eight-fifteen," I said.

Marshall looked at me too. "You were with him last night?"

"Yeah. Until eight-fifteen. Maybe a little later."

"I see," Marshall said. "That would place Olsen in the apartment at about eight-twenty-five or eight-thirty. That's the time the neighbors heard the shot. All right, Olsen, what happened when you discovered them together?"

FRANK started talking in a low voice. He told about his suspicions of Lesser, about Alice's coldness and about her backing out of going to Wisconsin with him. He told everything and it sounded fine. He built just the kind of story I was sure he would.

Then he said, "When I walked in they were sitting on the couch drinking. They both jumped up when they saw me. He had his coat off and she wasn't wearing much besides one of those hostess gowns. I don't know what I did. I yelled something at him and then I hit him. He fell down and I

picked him up and hit him a few more times. Alice was pulling at my sleeve and yelling at me and I turned and slapped her, hard. She fell down against the couch. I just stood there for a while. If I had a gun I would have killed him. Then I got out. I just walked around—I don't know how long—and then a squad car pulled up and a couple of cops jumped out. They brought me down to the station. That's about all, I guess."

When he got through Marshall said, "Very well, Olsen. I'll check into all of that. The thing we have to do is place you somewhere else at the exact moment that shot was fired. If you didn't fire the shot you must have been somewhere else. Possibly some one saw you on the street when the shot sounded. One connection like that and we can create a reasonable doubt in a jury's mind and that's all we need.

"One other thing. Don't talk to anybody from now on. The police will bother you but tell them to see me if they want any information. You've been indicted and no one can talk to you or even see you without your permission. Remember that. I'll be in to see you in a day or so."

He stood up and said, "Olsen, I'll be frank with you. The police have a good circumstantial case against you. Motive, opportunity, and by your own admission you were at the scene of the murder at approximately eight-thirty. That all adds up. If we go before a jury with that set-up against us I might not be able to help you. That is if you insist on a not-guilty plea. But if you take a guilty plea I could almost guarantee you an acquittal. Think it over. If you did do it, for Christ's sake say so and we'll have you out of here in a month."

"I didn't do it," Frank said.

"All right, we'll work on it from that

angle then," Marshall said. He looked at me. "Ready, Johnny?"

"Yeah." I gave Frank a smile. "Don't worry about a thing, kid."

He stood up and leaned forward until his face was just an inch or so from the bars. "Johnny, have you talked to Alice?"

"No, I haven't."

"You don't know how she is?"

"No."

"Well give her a message from me, will you Johnny? Tell her I'm not mad. Tell her I forgive her, Johnny."

"Sure, I'll tell her," I said.

WE LEFT then and went down to my car. Marshall didn't have anything to say. When we were driving back to the Loop, I said. "Well, what do you think?"

He shrugged. "I can clear him if he pleads guilty. No jury would convict a veteran under these circumstances. The unwritten law, defense of her honor and all of those old tear-jerkers are still better than the best police case in the world. But if he sticks to his story, and I can't find some way to prove it, he'll lose the jury's sympathy. They'll figure he did it, and they'll think he just doesn't have the courage to admit it. We can't use any tricks if he sticks to this story. All the tear jerkers will go out the window and we'll have to fight the state with evidence. And our supply of evidence is pretty thin compared to theirs."

"Well," I said, "if he didn't do it, he didn't do it."

"Do you think he's innocent?" he said.

"I don't know. He says he didn't, that's all I know. I think he ought to stick to that."

Marshall looked at me queerly. "You want him to stick to this story?"

"I didn't say that," I said.

Marshall was still looking at me. "Johnny, let's be straight. What's your angle in this case?"

"He's a friend of mine, that's all."

"What kind of a woman is his wife?"

I didn't know what he was after, but I felt scared.

"Just another babe," I said.

"I see." He frowned out the window for a while and he didn't say any more until I was almost at the City Hall.

Then he said. "This case is going to take some time. I'll need a thousand dollars for a start. Still interested?"

"You'll have a check in the morning," I said.

He chuckled. "It's going to be an interesting case. I hope you get your money's worth."

I dropped him at the City Hall and then I drove over and parked my car in the hotel garage. That thousand dollars was going to hurt. It would leave me two hundred in the bank and I spend that much in a month on tips.

But I wasn't worrying about that. The thing I was trying to figure was whether Marshall was shaking me down. Was he making a long guess about where I stood? If he was that wasn't any good. If he could make that good a guess somebody else might, too.

I went up to my room, trying to push away the feeling that something was about to slip.

CHAPTER X

I WENT up to my room and I thought about having some food sent up but I wasn't hungry. I hadn't eaten, but I still felt nervous and jittery. I took off my coat and tie and made a long drink, and then I sat down and tried to push the worry out of my mind.

I guess the drink helped. The cops thought Olsen was guilty, and he didn't have anything to prove he wasn't. If he stuck to his story Marshall was sure he'd be convicted.

That was the way I'd planned things and that's the way it was working. There wasn't anything to worry about.

About then the phone rang. The operator said, "There's a man on his way up to see you, Mr. Ford."

"Damn it," I said. I said, "I don't want to see every tie peddler that comes along. Why didn't you see who he was and find out if I wanted to see him?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Ford," she said, "but he was a detective. He showed me his badge and said he was going up and then he told me to tell you he was on his way. He said his name was Harrigan."

"Okay," I said and put the phone down slowly. I lit a cigarette and tried to think but my thoughts ran around in circles. Nothing came from those thoughts.

There was a knock on the door a little later and when I opened up he was standing there, his hat shoved back on his head.

"Sorry to bother you, Johnny," he said.

He came into the room, a tall thin guy with a pale face, graying hair and quick restless eyes. He sat down and hooked a leg over the chair and took his hat off and put it beside the chair on the floor.

"Drink?" I said.

"Good idea. I'm off duty, you know." He grinned at that.

I made two drinks, handed him one and then sat down myself.

"What is it?" I said.

"Routine stuff," he said. "I just want to get an idea of what happened last night."

"I thought you had all that," I said. "I was supposed to drive him down to the station, but he doubled back and caught this guy with his wife. What else do you want?"

He started looking through his pockets for a cigarette and he was still grinning. "Let me just ask a few questions. I'm too much a copper to find out anything any other way. How long have you known this guy Olsen?"

"I thought you wanted to know about last night," I said.

"This is background stuff. When did you meet him?"

"A couple of years ago. He used to drop in when I had the book out North."

"Was he a good friend of yours?"

"Just so-so. Pretty good, I guess."

"How long have you known his wife?"

"About as long," I said. "She used to put down a bet herself, every now and then."

"You mean they used to come into your place together?"

"No, I met her after he went overseas."

HE SIPPED at his drink and nodded. "Then you met her after he went in the army?"

"Yeah, that's right."

He said, "I'm not splitting hairs, I hope, but let's run over this again. You met him first. Then he went overseas, and you met her. Is that right?"

I nodded.

"Well, we've got that straightened out." He smiled. "It doesn't mean anything but I like to get all the background I can. You've seen her all the time he's been gone?"

"Not all the time," I said. "Maybe five or six times. We had a drink, things like that. I took her swimming once or twice I guess."

"She's an attractive woman, isn't she? I don't want to annoy you, but you were just friends, weren't you? No funny business on the side?"

"What a hell of a question," I said. I tried to sound half mad and half amused, but it was hard because I was winding up tight inside and I was afraid of this guy Harrigan.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Forget it. You saw him when he came home, didn't you?"

"I met him at the station and drove him out to where she lives. I didn't see him again until last night."

That was a slip, but it was all right. I'd actually forgotten about that afternoon he'd come up to see me. So when I said, "No, wait a minute. I saw him one other time," it sounded on the level. "He came up here one afternoon," I went on. "He was worried about his wife. He was afraid she'd been playing around while he was gone and he wanted to find out if I knew anything about it."

"You mean he suspected you?"

"Hell no. You cops think everybody in the world is crooked, don't you?"

He smiled. "Let's don't get started on what heels coppers are. I could talk about that all night. How long was he back before he came to see you?"

"Just a couple of days. He was pretty worried by that time. Some guy had been calling his wife. He'd gotten two or three of the calls, but the guy hung up when Frank got on the line. On top of that his wife wasn't acting too friendly."

"Okay," Harrigan said. "So much for that. Then Sunday night you went out there with the idea of driving them both down to the station. How was he acting about her not going?"

"They seemed kind of mad. I guess they'd been battling about it."

"What kind of a story did she give him?"

"She just said she had some work that had to be done."

"Then you and Frank left for the station. Let's have the rest of it."

"Okay," I said. I was jumpy and nervous and I was trying to think of how my story was going to sound. "We started downtown," I said. "I made a crack about it was too bad Alice had to work that night with this guy Lesser. That was the first he'd heard about that. He made me turn around and drive him back."

Harrigan sat up a little in his chair and he didn't look sleepy any more.

"Hold on," he said. "I thought she told him about that."

"She told him she had to do the work Monday morning."

"Well, how did you know she was seeing Lesser Sunday night?"

"I met Lesser Friday afternoon at a bar. He mentioned he was seeing her Sunday night. That's how I come to know about it."

"Friday afternoon, eh?"

"That's right?"

"Did you think it was funny he'd tell you about it?"

"I didn't think one way or the other about it. I already knew she was supposed to go to Wisconsin Sunday night. I figured he was mixed up."

HE WAS frowning. "You didn't tell him she was supposed to go Wisconsin?"

"It wasn't any of my business," I said.

"All right," he said. "Now what happened when you drove him back?"

"We parked out in front until Lesser showed. Then he asked me to drive him somewhere he could get a drink. At the tavern he called her up and she told him she was alone. That tore

things. He went back to the apartment and caught them together."

"And where did you go?" he asked.

"I got in my car and came back here."

"Good enough," he said. "Now let's make out a timetable. 'You left for the train at eight. You drove halfway downtown turned around and came back. You waited for Lesser, then you went to this bar and he made a phone call. What time did you get out of the bar?'"

"About eight-twenty."

"You worked pretty fast to do all that in twenty minutes," he said. He looked at his glass and then grinned suddenly. "Got another drink left?"

"That's the first smart question you've asked," I said.

"Maybe you're right," he said, when I handed him the fresh drink. "Maybe I'm playing a cock-eyed angle. You see I don't think this guy is guilty, Johnny."

I was taking a drink when he said that and my hand started shaking. Some of the liquor went down my shirt front. I put the drink down and took out my breast handkerchief.

"Shame to waste it," he said. He watched while I mopped at my shirt. Then he said: "Here's what I mean. There weren't any prints on the gun. That's funny. When a guy commits an unpremeditated murder he's generally too mad or scared to think about wiping off fingerprints. Second, when a husband shoots some guy who has been playing around with his wife he doesn't run away. He's generally the guy who calls the cops and he says, 'I just shot a guy and he deserved it.' That's the way he feels. He's not ashamed or afraid as a rule. He's proud of what he's done. But this guy Olsen insists he didn't do it in spite of a hell of a good circumstantial

case against him. That doesn't sound right to me."

He shook his glass for a while and watched the ice bounce around and there was a moody frown on his face.

"Something's wrong," he said. "I just don't feel right about it. Take the way the drawers in the bedroom were messed around for instance. Who did that? Not Olsen. He lives there. He knows where things are. But supposing some stranger went in there looking for something. He might have to go through the drawers and closet to find it."

"What would a stranger be looking for?" I said.

"Possibly the gun," Harrigan said. "And here's one more angle. The woman who lives below the Olsen apartment says someone rang her bell about eight-thirty. She rang the buzzer and went to the door but there wasn't anyone there. At the time she thought it was some kids playing a prank."

"It could have been," I said.

"Sure it could," he said. "But I don't think so. It all ties into a theory I'm playing around with. Supposing, Johnny, this thing was a frame. Supposing someone wanted to get rid of Lesser. And they set things up so that Frank Olsen would catch him in a compromising position and shoot his brains out. Then the deal backfires. Olsen doesn't shoot Lesser. He just bats him one and slaps his wife a couple of times and walks out. Now if this guy was watching from outside the building he'd know something had gone wrong. So he rings the bell of the first apartment and gets inside that way. Upstairs in her apartment he sees what's happened. Now he might figure out right then that he could shoot Lesser and Olsen would get blamed. So, first of all, he needs a gun. He tears into the bedroom, rips open the drawers until

he finds Olsen's gun. Then he shoots Lesser and goes out the back of the building. No one sees him, so Olsen gets blamed."

"Maybe you've got something," I said. My voice sounded a little funny because my throat was dry. I took a swallow from my drink but it didn't help the dryness any.

HARRIGAN had the whole thing doped out, except for one thing. He was figuring someone had tried to get rid of Lesser. Once he ran that down and got nowhere he might start looking at it from another angle.

"It's worth checking," he said. "Do you know anybody who might want Lesser out of the way?"

"I didn't know him that well."

"When did you have lunch with him?"

"Last Friday."

"I see. Now what time did you get downtown Sunday night?"

That stopped me for a minute. I knew the answer to that, but I didn't like the way he hopped around from one thing to another. There didn't seem to be any sense in it, but I knew there was a reason.

"Around eight-thirty, I guess," I said.

"You left him at eight-twenty at sixty hundred north. You made good time if you got here at eight-thirty,"

"I guess I drove pretty fast," I said. I grinned. "Are you going to give me a ticket?"

"I might shake you down for a few bucks some time when I'm hard up," he grinned. He kept grinning and said, "Have you got any way to prove you got down here at eight-thirty, Johnny?"

I kept my smile but my mouth felt stretched and tight.

"Are you kidding?" I said.

"It doesn't mean anything," he said. "I just want some way to check the time table."

"Well, I'm telling you I got here at eight-thirty. Isn't that good enough?"

"Not for a murder case, Johnny."

"That's great," I said. "If you think I'm lying why don't you come right out and say so. I can prove what time I got here but you can go to hell."

He gave me a puzzled look which was what I wanted. I wanted to bring in my alibi now but I wanted to do it my way. "That's just fine," I said. I got up and walked up and down the room a couple of times.

"I don't know why you're blowing your top," he said. "I just want one thing. If you can prove you were here at eight-thirty you must have left him by eight-twenty. That's all I want."

"Won't you take my word for it?"

"That's no good, Johnny, and you know it."

"So you'll subpoena me and make me talk. Sure you will. You don't care how it's going to embarrass someone else if I talk."

"Johnny, I never knew you got embarrassed so easy," he said.

"I'm not talking about me," I said. I went over and picked up the phone and called the restaurant. "You'll get your proof," I said.

When the manager answered I asked for the blonde. She got on the phone about a minute later.

"Honey, this is Johnny. Can you come up here for a minute?"

"What? Johnny, I'm working. I got three tables waiting for me."

"It's important."

"Well . . . all right."

I hung up and Harrigan was watching me with a puzzled look.

"I don't get all this," he said.

"Maybe you'll see in a minute."

He shrugged and lit a cigarette. We

didn't say anything. I tried to keep up the act but I was scared. She was pretty drunk that night and if she didn't remember that telephone call and the business about the time it could cause trouble.

Finally there was a light knock on the door. I opened up and she was standing there with a coat on over the uniform and I noticed she was wearing the ring. That was good.

"What is it, Johnny?" she said. She looked nervous and a little scared.

"Come on in. I want you to talk to a guy here."

SHE came in and I shut the door. Harrigan stood up and she looked at him uncertainly. I said, "Honey, this is a guy named Harrigan. He's a copper. He wants to ask you a few questions. Take a seat. He won't bite." I looked at Harrigan. "This is Marie Walonski."

He nodded at her and she sort of jerked her head in his direction and she sat down and began smoothing the skirt over her knees.

Harrigan sat down and picked up his glass again and said, "Marie, this isn't official. There's nothing to be worried about. I'm not sure myself why Johnny asked you to come here, but I gather you were with him Sunday night. Is that right?"

She looked quickly at me, but I kept my eyes down on my drink. She had to do this on her own or it wouldn't mean a damn thing.

She looked back at him and nodded slowly. "Yes, that's right."

"What time?"

"I—I don't know for sure." She looked at me helplessly. "What time was it, Johnny?"

My throat felt choked and dry. I felt like hitting her. *Stupid, drunken*
(Continued on page 122)

HALLOWED BE THY NAME

By PAUL W. FAIRMAN

Justice means many things to many men;
but when the time comes for that last day
of Judgment, maybe Man's rules won't fit



YEAH, I know, Father, prayers are good. I need prayers pretty bad but we haven't got very long and I want to tell you how it was. How it was *really* . . .

Yeah, I know. But you say them for me—afterwards. I've got to tell you now. How it started and how it all was.

You see it started like kind of a miracle. A miracle to me, anyhow. I never had any permanent connections—anybody to hang to. All I remember as a kid was my dad beating up my mother and after she ran out on him I couldn't see any reason for sticking around, so I took a powder, too. But I made out all right. I was a big kid and I did about everything you could think of to get along. I even got myself a little education—not much and that

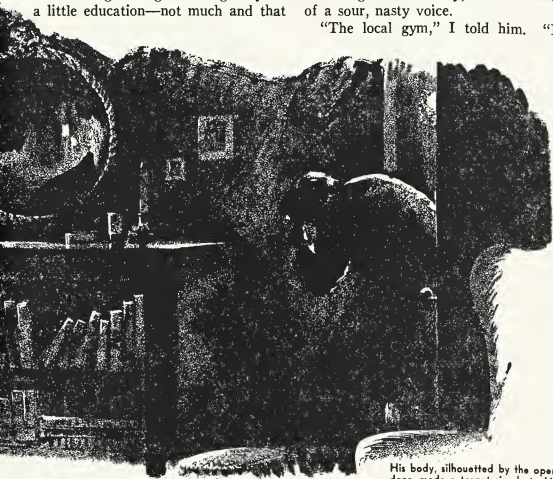
sort of on the fly. When I got bigger, I drifted into the fight game.

All that's not important. I'm just telling you so you'll know why I dropped off the freight that day. It looked like a nice town and I thought maybe I could pick up a prelim at the local fight club.

I walked up the main drag, looking for the place when a cop spotted me and herded me over to the wall. In a way I couldn't blame him, because I was kind of a tough looking customer. I'd been riding a coal car for eight hours and should have cleaned up somewhere on the edge of town, but I thought I could do that at the fight club, if they had one.

Anyway, he nailed me. He said, "Looking for somebody, bo?" in kind of a sour, nasty voice.

"The local gym," I told him. "I



His body, silhouetted by the open door, made a target simple to hit

thought I might find a promoter looking for a boy."

"We've got no gym, but we've got a nice jail and some vagrancy laws," the cop snarled. He grabbed my arm and it looked like I was going to have one on the city. The cop had come up in a squad car and he was hauling me toward it and I had decided not to put up a battle, when this lean, good looking guy wandered over.

He'd come out of the drug store a few yards down and had stood there watching the cop brace me. He wandered over, kind of grinning, and said, "What goes, Taylor? Pick yourself up a killer?"

Right away I could see that this guy was important, because the cop eased up on my arm and got his hand almost to his cap before he caught himself. He just missed saluting the guy.

And he was only a kid—about my age I figured, but we were as different as Clark Gable and Gargantua, with me on the short end. He had everything you can acquire plus the stuff you have to be born with. He had class. Maybe everyone wouldn't have seen it, but I did because it was such a rarity in places I traveled. Good looks, but that wasn't it. There are some swell looking rats in the world. Easy self confidence, that wasn't it either. It was something you can't describe, but it was there.

The cop said, "A vagrant. We try to keep them out of town. We'll take him to the city limits and send him on his way."

THE guy kept that little off-hand grin on his face and said, "No visible means of support, eh? Hmmm," and you could see he was thinking about something. Something that would annoy the cop. Then he said, "Wait a minute," and ducked back into the drug store.

A minute later he came back and handed me an envelope, still grinning a little, and said, "Take this to 510 Lorel Place. Give it to anyone who answers the door. If there's no one there bring it back. I'll wait here."

He turned his grin on the cop then and said, "How now, Taylor? That makes him an honest citizen, doesn't it? A man with a purpose. A respectable working stiff."

The cop looked puzzled. You could see that this was something new and he needed a little time to figure it.

I didn't wait for him to do it. I stuck the envelope in my pocket and beat it up the street—not running, but not exactly idling along either. I turned the first corner I came to and slowed up a little. It wasn't hard to see through the caper. The guy was just a good Joe. He either wanted to give me a break or he wanted to cross the cop. It wasn't important to me which. I took the envelope out of my pocket and looked at it.

It wasn't addressed to anybody. It wasn't even sealed. The flap was turned in and I thought it was empty. I thought that until I opened it. Then I stopped dead and my chin touched the sidewalk.

There was a brand new hundred dollar bill in it!

The thing quit making sense right there. I started walking again and let some ideas run through my mind. Maybe it was a racket of some kind. Maybe the guy was working with the copper and they were going to nail me for a felony. Whatever it was, I didn't like it. I came within an inch of tossing the envelope into the gutter and hitting for the railroad racks.

But you don't throw a C-note into the gutter, so I kept on walking and pretty soon the thought came: Why not do like the guy said? Why not follow

the play through the way he called it? It didn't make sense, but neither did anything else. So I flagged down a passing delivery truck and found out where Lorel Place was.

It was a half an hour hike across town, a cute little white bungalow on a nice street with a tunnel of trees and flower gardens all around. The kind of a place you dream about living in when you're lying on a couple of rods with car wheels pounding in your ears.

I went up the little red tile walk and rang the front door bell and waited. Nothing happened. I rang it again and then went around the back.

Something on the porch back there made it pretty obvious that no one was in. A dead cat lying by the door. A cat all smashed to hell. It had evidently been run over by some truck in the alley and a passing joker had thought it very smart to heave the thing up on the porch. There are guys like that.

But I rang the bell anyway. Then I tossed the cat over in the alley and started back the way I'd come.

He was standing there in front of the drug store, waiting for me, just the way he said he would. The cop was gone. When I walked up he gave me the grin. I handed him the envelope. He said, "No one home?"

"I don't think you expected anyone to be there."

"As a matter of fact there couldn't have been. I live there myself—alone—and I'm down here."

"What was the gag?"

"Did you look in the envelope?"

"Sure I did. A hundred dollar bill. What was I supposed to do? High tail it out of town?"

He thought that over for a while before he answered. "No, I don't think so. I'm not sure what I expected you to do. Come on, let's take a ride."

HE HAD a Packard coupe standing a little way down the street. I got in beside him and we went away from there. He didn't have anything to say while we rolled through town and into the outskirts. I didn't have anything to say either. I was too busy wondering.

Finally he stopped and pulled to the side of the road. From where we sat we could see the high railroad trestle across the river. A freight was dragging across it, puffing and working like the going was tough. He looked up at it and said:

"I walk out on that thing sometimes. You can see a long way up and down the river. Good place to get a deep breath of air." Then he turned on me, with a quick jerk. "How would you like to settle down? Work for me."

I thought of a dozen questions. The one I asked was, "Doing what?"

"Oh—drive me around. Clean up the yard a little maybe, and—talk to me."

Something in the way he said that last, gave me the whole picture in a flash. The guy was lonesome. That was what it added up to. The whole deal was as screwy as a busted-up picture puzzle but that was the answer.

"How do you know I won't walk away with the joint?" I asked him. "You don't know a damn thing about me."

He started turning the car around, and, some way, he seemed a little happier. "You can tell me all about yourself, but don't bother now. You'll want to clean up. What's your name?"

I told him it was Wallace Brady. He said, "Fine, Wally. I'm Spencer Holloway. I think we'll get along fine."

Later I found out that he was twenty-three years old. That put him a year up on me.

And I found out everything else

about him too—in time. Some of it quite a long time after that day he took me to the little white house and showed me where I'd stay. Right in the house with him, just like a guest. Like an old school pal.

And from the first, I knew something was wrong. Not that anything pointed to it. It was just a feeling. I knew that he was awfully lonesome and bewildered about something—and that he was scared. Sometimes he'd get me up in the middle of the night just to sit and talk and smoke cigarettes—I never saw him touch a drop of liquor—and while we talked he would sort of calm down and then go back to bed and sleep sometimes into the next afternoon.

He had all the money in the world and what work he did was for a newspaper. He just did it because he liked to, but he was a damn good reporter and they took anything they could get from him. They'd call up and tell him to go to a place where something had happened and write the story and when he did they always published it without any changes, right under his name. He was that good. But he wouldn't go all the time. He seemed to have an instinct for knowing when a thing was big and when it wasn't and he never missed.

That was part of my job, driving him. I didn't have to. He'd never ask me. He never asked me to do anything, but be around when he wanted to talk. But I drove him anyway. I remember when they found the little girl's body in a vacant lot. They called him about one in the morning and he started off without me. I heard him and just managed to hook an arm inside the car as he was pelting out into the street. He did a whale of a job on that story. They printed it on the news wires from coast to coast and the detectives working on the case went around with copies of his story in their pockets.

I DON'T know. Maybe he didn't pick the big ones. Maybe his being on them *made* them big. There wasn't much crime in a clean little town like that, but parts of a story he wrote about the young mother slashed to death in an areaway, was used by the minister at her funeral.

And once when he decided politics were a little rotten he wrote three articles about the local machine, just before election. The machine went out. Maybe it would have gone out anyway, but I don't think so.

I don't know when it was that I realized I loved the guy. Those things sort of sneak up on you, slow. You go along being grateful to someone for a break—for something that's changed your whole life—and wishing to Christ you could do something to show your appreciation. Then, one day, you realize it's grown to more than that. You know that whatever that person did—however hard they kicked you or busted you in the teeth, you, and everything you have is theirs. And you realize you couldn't do anything about it if you wanted to. You're—you're kind of hooked.

But he never kicked me in the teeth or anywhere else. Instead he practically made me one of the family.

I don't think I told you about that yet—his family. You see the Holloways were one of the top ten families. Old man Holloway made around five million in mining properties and then died and left it to his wife and three children. One son was out west, married, and the girl was only around fifteen—a late kid and a swell kid. She was in a school in the east and spent her summers in the mansion on Bluff Avenue, with her mother. Spence was over there quite a lot and I was usually with him. I never found out why he was living away from home, in the little

white house. We never talked about that.

And I don't think his mother liked me at first. Later, she did, though. She had to, to tell me what she did. She was kind of a queenly woman with a lot of beautiful white hair and proud way about her. She looked to be sixty, but she was probably a lot younger than that. I never found out.

I saw the fear in her eyes the first day I met her, and I thought it was some kind of fear of me. It was, in a way. I'll tell you about that later, but first I want to prove that I loved Spence Holloway. And I can do it too. This way:

What's the most valuable thing in the world to a person? The thing they want most and don't see how they can get along without? Right? That's the way I see it. Okay. About two years after I hit town and moved in with Spence, when I was happier than I'd ever been in my life, I met a girl. Jean was her name and I won't say much about her. It hurts too much to talk about Jean. I'll just say that she was a tall, slim, shy kid, who had everything in the world I ever wanted or would want. I had been happy. Now I was living right up in heaven.

I'd known her for three or four months before I brought her around and introduced her to Spence—proud as Lucifer, I was, and hoping he'd like her. Like her? He went overboard like a frog with shot in its belly.

He didn't say much, though, and, at first, I didn't notice it. Then I couldn't help seeing it. He was nuts about her. But still, he held off. No stepping in and making a play against me. He wouldn't do a thing about it—but I would, and I did.

I STARTED to back away. If Spence wanted my girl he could have her.

When I said he could have anything of mine, I wasn't kidding. I didn't break anything off suddenly. I just kind of pushed them together and backed out of the picture, trying to make it look natural, and after a while Jean was his girl. I guess that proves what I said, doesn't it?

They were planning to get married, but just then, Mrs. Holloway took sick. It wasn't much at first, but it got worse and then they knew she was dying. We were over there that night, all of us, moping around in the big house, waiting for what we knew would come. I hadn't seen her for several days and I was pretty much surprised when she sent for me. So was everybody else, I guess. Especially when they all got chased out, leaving me alone with her. That was what she wanted.

I remember her lying there, a tiny old lady, now, in a big white bed, and with something in her face that was as close to hell as I ever want to see. All the fear and the terror had come bubbling to the surface. She made me sit on the bed and lean down close. She said, "I've been a coward all my life. Horrible coward, but you know—don't you? You know what it is. You're closest to him. Tell me you know and that you'll—do something. I never had the courage." She said all that into my ear in a stiff whisper and I could see that she was in horrible pain and that the pain was in her heart, in her spirit, in her soul. She was trying to get some horror out of herself before she died with it there.

And I was too thick, I was too dense. I couldn't get it. She saw that but still she couldn't force out the right words—the clear words.

"When he was young it was flies and mice and little things that squealed and writhed," she gasped. "Later it was—It isn't his fault. Foul blood back in the line. Oh God!"

She died then, staring at the ceiling as though some ghastliness had reached down and strangled her.

I called them and went downstairs and out of the house and looked up at the sky and tried to think. What had she been trying to tell me? Flies, mice, things that squealed and writhed. Foul blood back in the line. What was the sense to all that?

Then I got it! Oh my God in heaven, how I got it! It reached up like a club and smashed me between the eyes and I went down on my hands and knees and was sick. That was how hard it hit me. That cat, smashed to pieces on the porch that first day. The little girl they found. The young woman slashed to ribbons in the areaway. My brain raced back and rechecked. Both times I hadn't been with him. He'd been alone.

Then I rolled over and beat the grass with my fists, because I knew that Spence, the guy I loved more than anybody on earth, the guy I'd given my girl to—*was a homicidal maniac!*

Everything had dropped into place now; the little questions, the tiny wonderings of three years, they turned into ropes, tying him up tight.

I can't remember much about the next twelve hours. I got up and wandered away from there. I saw a blur of streets and trees and water and sky and finally came staggering back, knowing only one thing—I had to kill Spence Holloway. I had to be the executioner. That was what his mother had meant, had told me, and it was what had to be done. How? That was the question. How do you kill the thing you love?

I don't think he noticed anything different about me. With the funeral and general upset, everybody was a little off normal and I got by with it, but I knew I couldn't do it for long. So a couple

of days after his mother was buried, I nudged him into taking a walk. It wasn't too hard. We did a lot of walking together. And we'd walked out on the trestle quite a few times too, just as we did this time.

I slowed down and came to a stop right in the center of it. Sweat was running out of me all over. I opened my mouth to say something but I didn't say it because it would have been nothing but a croak.

HE WASN'T noticing though. He was standing on the very edge, looking off up the river. I was behind him. So damned easy. Just a little shove and he'd go down on the rocks underneath. Then he could sleep next to his mother in the graveyard and not be scared anymore; scared of the thing inside him that he couldn't control.

But I didn't shove. I couldn't make my hands go out against him. I could have reached around my own throat and choked myself to death, maybe, but I couldn't push him off the bridge. I yelled, "Come on! Let's get out of here!" And I hiked for home.

Back in the living room I flopped down on the lounge, weak as a kitten and he stood over me and said, "You know don't you? Mother told you. You know everything about me."

I nodded. "Uh-huh. I know everything. You're a killer."

Neither of us moved. I sat there, icy, and he could have been a statue—an expressionless statue. Then he said, "Get out. Take your things. Get out." His voice didn't raise a thirteenth of a note and his face was stiff like a wall holding back a flood.

After a while I got up and packed my things in a suitcase I'd bought and came back through the living room. He hadn't moved. I didn't say a word. No goodbye. I left.

But I wasn't through. I hadn't changed my mind. I still had to do it.

So I figured out a way. I knew I could never look him in the face and do it. Seeing him I couldn't make my hands work. But it could be done. I bought a pistol in a pawn shop, where they weren't too particular who they sold to and picked up a box of shells. I filled the gun and threw the rest of the bullets in the river.

I hung around the neighborhood then, and waited. I had to wait for three nights before I caught him away from home. But on the third night the house stayed dark until I couldn't be seen slipping in. I used the back door and, once inside, I got set just where I wanted to be, at the edge of the living room where I could cover the entrance hall. He'd come in the front door and snap on the light. Only he wouldn't quite reach it. It was my job to see that he didn't.

Twenty minutes later, I fired three shots while the hand was reaching. The lean, slim shadow crashed to the floor, Father. And that was how it was.

Yes, I know the mistake I made. It wasn't him—it was her. All because I didn't have the guts to look him in the face while I killed him. It was Jean

who came in that door and took my three bullets.

And the way they told it at my trial. How I was a no-good rat he'd taken in off the street and how I'd tried to take her away from him. When I couldn't do that, I shot her down in cold blood so he couldn't have her.

But it wasn't true, Father. None of it was true. I tried to tell them that in court, but I didn't have a chance. They'd have laughed at me, only there isn't any laughing in a murder trial. It's a pretty deadly thing.

And I don't blame the jury. I killed Jean and I deserve to die and I'm not afraid. It wasn't that, Father. It's just that she's dead and I'll be dead, but he'll go on—killing—killing—killing. One of these days there'll be another little girl found somewhere, and he'll probably go out and write up the story and they'll print it from coast to coast. You understand, don't you, Father? That's why I'll maybe let out a scream or two when they push me into the chair. *He's* still alive.

Yeah, I can hear them coming for me. . . . Maybe you're right. Okay, you lead off.

“ Who art in heaven.
Hallowed be Thy name. ”

HOW THEY HANDLE FRAUD

MOST people think of Scotland Yard as a police agency skilled only in the detection of murderers, housebreakers, and thieves, and to the patient and ingenious investigation of clues. But some of Scotland Yard's detectives have also been known as financial experts, well versed in all the intricacies of business law and accountancy.

How, it may be asked, can they acquire this knowledge? Surely it cannot be taught in any detective class?

The answer is that it is acquired while working under senior officers to whom the inquiries have been entrusted, and who, in their turn, have gained their knowledge in the same hard school of experience. These senior officers know how to select the younger men who have an aptitude for dealing with complicated accounts. Their team for the investigation of a big case may number

four, five, or even six officers taken from the central staff at Scotland Yard, and the senior officer himself has gained his knowledge by many years of experience, study, and hard work.

Whenever a big fraud is brought to the attention of the director of public prosecutions, he requests the assistance of Scotland Yard to make the necessary investigations. Upon this the best officer who is free from other cases is sent over to the director's office, and he then becomes the servant of the director of public prosecutions until the case is brought to trial and finished by the conviction of the accused.

Scotland Yard's Chief Inspector Alfred Collins, now retired, was probably the ablest officer in this difficult phase of detective work. It is work that could never be taught in the widely advertised police college. It is acquired only by years of experience.—*John Crail.*



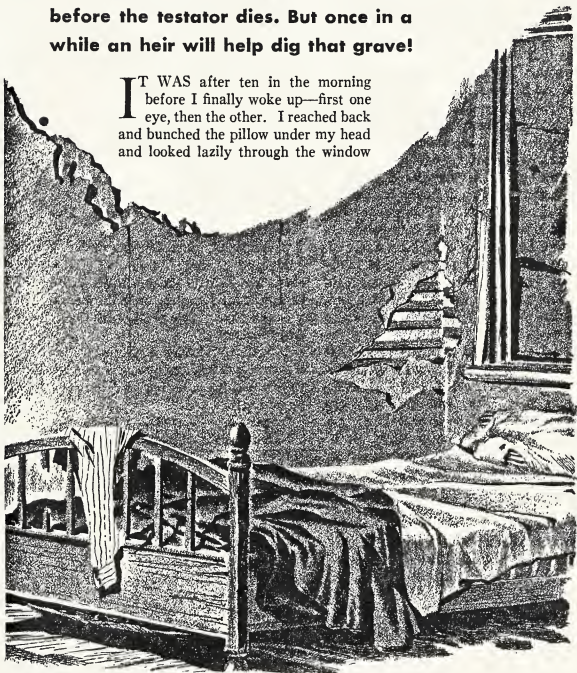
That lifeless leg gave the final touch to the room's complete squalor

There's Death in the Heir

by Larry Holden

It's difficult to cash in on a will before the testator dies. But once in a while an heir will help dig that grave!

IT WAS after ten in the morning before I finally woke up—first one eye, then the other. I reached back and bunched the pillow under my head and looked lazily through the window



at the broad-leafed oak tree waving majestically in the breeze like a reluctant dowager at a railroad station. The bright sun was a scarf of shining silk over the window sill. I frowned at that. It was in the wrong place. It should have been sprawled across my bed. I turned my head and fumbled with drowsy eyes for the alarm clock, ticking on the night table. When I saw the position of the hands, I said, "Kee-rist!" and came out of the bed as if it had suddenly filled with centipedes. My time for getting up and at 'em is seven, not ten.

Then I remembered, and stood there grinning foolishly with my pajama top dangling from one shoulder. I wasn't going down to the Agency office this morning. This was the day Dinny Keogh was giving detecting back to the flat-footed Indians. This was my day for doing nothing with both hands.

I'd been out of town on a dull, routine job that had tied me up in Philadelphia for three weeks. I'd have had more fun in a strait jacket in a mildewed cellar. I figured I had earned a day off.

I had planned to spend most of it in bed with a copy of my favorite mystery magazine, a bottle of Old Bushmills best Irish, and—oh, hell, you know the kind of verdant ideas you get. I knew I'd never really do it. I'll stay in bed if someone puts an armed guard over me, but otherwise I have to keep going. I went into the kitchen, halved a cantaloupe, poured a glass of milk, sat down to the table in my pajamas and enjoyed the first leisurely breakfast I'd had in months. A couple of energetic flies landed on the edge of the table and made a series of nervous flanking movements that eventually would have brought them to the lip of my melon. I waved my hand over them and said good-na-

turedly, "G'wan, beat it!" instead of trying to knock their brains out with a folded newspaper. I was going to relax. Tomorrow I'd beat their brains out.

I took a shower, shaved and dressed, and only then did I call Minnie at the office to let her know I was back.

"Oh, Mr. Keogh," she cried. "How nice to hear your voice again. So you're back!"

Minnie was my office girl, and I'd gotten her from an insurance company. (Not as a dividend.) She was efficient, has the kind of figure that made lingerie ads a national institution, but her face, poor kid, looks like a conscience worn on the outside.

"No, Minnie," I corrected her. "I'm not back. Tomorrow I'm back. Today I'm still away."

"Did you have a nice trip, Mr. Keogh?"

"Wonderful, Minnie, wonderful—going and coming, but in the middle there was a little too much Philadelphia. Today I'm going up to the Bronx zoo and throw fish at the sea lions. Anything new?"

"We-ll . . . I have it all down, Mr. Keogh. Last Wednesday a man wanted you to find his wife, but on Thursday he said never mind."

"Smart boy. Anything else?"

"There was a call from Joseph Flavin, that headquarters detective. He said . . . uh . . ." Her voice trailed off, then came back hurriedly, "He said where's that box of cigars you owe him?"

I grinned. Joe had probably said, ask that guy Keogh where the hell's that box of ropes he owes me. But nice girls don't swear.

I chuckled, "Okay, Minnie. I'll see to it. Is that all?"

"No. Freddy called."

"Freddy? Who's Freddy?"

"I don't know, Mr. Keogh. He said it was important and that he'd call back today."

"Tell him I'm in Philadelphia. I'll see him tomorrow if it's still important, but it probably won't be. I don't know any Freddy's."

But after I hung up, the name gnawed at me. I know a couple Freds, but they weren't the kind of guys who'd call themselves Freddy, even in a joke. I chased it around for a minute or two, because I felt I should know a Freddy, but it wouldn't come and I called police headquarters instead.

A VOICE said grumpily, "Headquarters. Sergeant Molarsky."

"Hi, Sarge, is that foul-mouthed flat-foot, Flavin, around?"

"Ain't in." Short. Like that.

That surprised me, because Molarsky is usually a cop you can kid with, but I kept it pleasant. I said, "Know where he's gone, Sarge? This is Dinny Keogh. I got some cigars for him."

"Try Universal Electric, out in the meadows." Bang!

I hung up and grimaced. I didn't get it, but I didn't like it. Now I was going to have to find out why. Cops have been mad at me before, but there was always a reason, and sometimes a good one. Ah, hell. It was beginning to look as if the sea lions were going to have to go hungry. I was going to have to feed the wolves instead.

I got the Agency heap out of the garage, picked up a box of fifty Dutch Masters and a bottle of Old Bushmills at the gin mill, then hit the River Road. It was warming up to be a hot day.

Everybody around here calls it the meadows, but its the big salt marsh that separates Newark from Jersey City. It's filled with factories, slaughterhouses, railroads, smoke and stench. In the fall the sparks from the loco-

motives set the dry reeds afire and sometimes there are fifteen or twenty fires raging out there. It is not listed as one of the scenic wonders of Jersey.

Universal Electric was just one of the factories in the meadows. It had a four acre parking lot, but when I got there only four cars were standing in it, and all of them police cars. A long string of slowly moving men and women walked in an unending line over before the high wire fence, covering both entrances. They were carrying signs and had placards strapped to their shoulders. They were peaceable enough, laughing and chatting with one another, some eating sandwiches or ice cream cones, others reading newspapers as they walked.

I saw Flavin in one of the cars and bucked the line at the gate. It didn't do any good. The gate was open, but the line was not. It closed in front of me and a heavy woman asked quietly, as if she really wanted to know, "Are you crossing the line, brother?"

I didn't say anything. I just flashed my buzzer and they opened up and let me through.

FLAVIN saw me coming across the deserted lot and waved. He had a cardboard container of coffee in his hand. It sloshed as he waved.

He said, "What gives, Dinny? Coming in with a load of finks?"

He didn't say it nastily; just curiously. It didn't mean anything to him one way or the other. He had a broad, placid face that had a kind of half grin pasted on it most of the time, and he took things that happened in the course of duty in his easy-going stride. But he was tough, just about as tough as the horn on the end of a rhinoceros. And he had just about the foulest mouth in the whole department. His conversation was larded with those words editors

turn into asterisks, and he seemed totally unconscious that anyone would take offense at them. I don't think he even knew he used them.

I leaned on the open window and asked, "How come you're out here in the Wilderness? I thought you were on the Vice Squad. What's the Chief afraid of—that one of those poor goonies out there will bust out in a crap game?"

Both he and the other dick, sprawled on the back seat eating a banana, stared at me with just the flicker of a frown behind their eyes, as if they thought maybe I was making a wisecrack and didn't think they liked it.

Flavin picked up a ham sandwich from the seat beside him, pulled off the wax paper wrappings, flipped it thoughtfully out of the other window, then tore a bite out of the sandwich. Finally he asked, "Where the hell have you been?"

"Philadelphia," I said, "for three weeks."

He said "Oh," and relaxed. "I don't think you know Kruger, my new partner. Homicide. Formerly." He guffawed and stuck the rest of the sandwich in his mouth. "This is Dinny Keogh, Kruger. A blank something stinking private snoop."

Kruger didn't look as if he thought it much of a joke, but he shifted his banana to his left hand and we shook over the back of the seat. Flavin wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"There's been blank hell to pay. The whole department's been shuffled around," he said, calmly enough, I thought. "Elections are coming up in the fall, you know, and a guy named Mitchell, president of the Citizens League has been making speeches. You know how it is, Dinny, nobody pays much attention; it's just run-of-the-mill

pre-election crap, but I could feel things getting a little nervous and touchy. I couldn't put my lousy finger on it, but it was there.

"Then this bird Michell gets the damndest break. A house-breaker gets into his house one night, and Mitchell lets him have the whole load of an old army .45 right in the puss. What a mess! You know them .45's. But there's enough of the guy left to identify, and I'll be a red, white and blue something if it doesn't turn out to be Lonny Buttman, one of Simmy Underwood's prize torpedoes, and he has two rods on him."

I said, "Oh-oh!"

Kruger swore morbidly on the back seat.

FLAVIN rambled on, "Brother, was that guy a hero! ARMED GANGSTER KILLED BY MAYORALTY CANDIDATE. Buttman has his pockets stuffed with this guy's jewelry and some cash. He was giving the joint the once over lightly, and not getting too much at that. Nothing worth losing your head with .45's on account of."

"Like I said, that makes this Mitchell a double-breasted hero, and speeches start coming out of him like ants from an ice box, and he concentrates on gambling. He's on the first page, and that makes things tough. The Chief and the Commissioner are on the spot, so what do the dopes do but stage one of the biggest gambling raids you ever did see. The whole damn department."

"Dinny, I'm telling you. It was one of the funniest gambling raids you ever seen. Forty million cops out with wagons and axes, and what do you think we get? Nothing. Four-five busted down pin-ball machines, a couple floating crap games, and maybe twenty-thirty candy stores selling penny punch boards."

"It was a big laugh," said Kruger morosely, "Everybody laughed. Me, I'm still laughing."

"Yeah?" said Flavin mildly. "The papers laughed. I know that. Only the Chief don't think it's so funny. We should have picked up more stuff than that, but you know yourself, Dinny, what a smart onion this Simmy Underwood is. He could see what was coming, so he ships all his gambling stuff out of the city, and sits back to wait till it blows over. He knew. Hell, he'd been through it before."

I said, "But . . ."

Flavin paid no attention. I think he just wanted to get it off his chest. "So," he went on, "the Chief tries the next best thing. He sends us out to pick up Simmy Underwood—but Simmy had packed his bags and travelled. We couldn't even get a smell of him, and he must have taken his whole organization with him, because the best we can find is a few of his cheapest punks, and they got more bullet holes in them than Rockefeller's got dollars."

I said, "Hell, somebody tipped Underwood off." But it was the wrong thing to say. I should have known Flavin was taking it harder than he sounded.

That little smile still held up his mouth at one corner, but his eyes were colder than two ice cubes in a highball. Kruger leaned forward his cigarette dangling from his lips. A veil of smoke drifted before his face, but the hostility in his stare was something I could almost taste—acid, burning.

Flavin said gently, "That so? And maybe you figure it was the Chief who tipped Underwood, the Chief being my brother-in-law and one of the only two guys who knew about the raid beforehand. Or maybe you think it was the Commissioner?"

I back-pedalled and said hurriedly,

"But as you said, Underwood *was* a smart onion. Anyway, here's that box of cigars I owe you."

He took the box, looked at it and threw it in the back seat. "Have a cigar, Kruger?" he said.

Kruger threw the box back on the front seat. "Never smoke them."

Flavin handed the box back to me. "He don't like them," he said.

It was the brush-off, but good. I didn't stand around to argue about it, because the only things I could think of to say would have made it worse.

I said, "Well, see you around," and walked back toward the gate. I heard Kruger say something like, "Another sonuvabitch," and I had to let it go.

A good cop, Flavin—a tough cop, a square cop, but first and foremost a cop. Maybe in two-three weeks he'd forget about it.

CHAPTER II

WHEN I got back to the city I called Minnie, hoping something had turned up at the office to take my mind off the way I'd stepped in it up to my sweatband. The hell with the sea lions. They could go eat water-cress.

When Minnie heard my voice over the phone, she said quickly, "Just a minute," and after a few seconds I heard another click that told me she'd picked up the call in my office. "He's sitting outside, Mr. Keogh," she said in a low voice. "I told him you wouldn't be in today, but he won't go away. He just sits and looks at me. He makes me nervous."

"Who sits and looks?"

"He says he's Freddy. I told him repeatedly—"

"What does he look like?" I interrupted.

"Well, he's short and dark and—"

well—oily kind of, you know what I mean? He has a little black moustache that's pointed at the ends and he—"

Then I knew who Freddy was. It was the moustache. He had one of those unpronounced Syrian names or something, and everybody called him Freddy, just because Freddy seemed to suit him. He was mixed up in all kinds of screwy businesses and deals. He'd managed a couple of wrestlers he tried to promote as the heaviest heavy-weights in the world. They were so fat that even the ordinary grip-and-grunt boys said it gave them the creeps to wrestle them. I didn't blame them. The tallow hung from them like pillow-cases from a washline. Another time Freddy had boxing midgets. He also sold things—Oriental rugs (guaranteed to be rugs), Arizona diamonds, Indian filigree jewelry, stuff like that.

"Is he selling something?" I asked curiously. I wasn't buying anything from the best Freddy in the world.

"Selling? I didn't say anyth—"

"Does he have a little suitcase with him, or a rug over his arm?"

"I tried to find out what his business was, Mr. Keogh, but he just keeps saying it's personal and won't tell me."

I said, "Ah hell," and drummed on the side of the phone box with my fingernails. "Put him on, and if he's trying to rig me for one of his fancy deals, I'll wring his Syrian neck for him."

She put down the phone and I heard her walk across the office, open the door and mumble something. The phone rattled again as Freddy picked it up and in a voice you could have poured over waffles, he said, "Ah, Mr. Keogh. You're in good health, I trust?"

I said, "Dandy. What's on your mind?"

"I would like to talk with you, Mr. Keogh."

"I know that. What about?"

"About a matter that will be of mutual benefit to us. You will be returning shortly to your office, I surmise?"

I knew all about those matters of mutual benefit he went around talking to people about, and I didn't want any. I didn't need any fat wrestlers.

"My kind of business or your kind of business?" I asked shortly.

He thought it over, then said, "Oh, yes. Of course. Now I understand. Your kind of business. Naturally. I come as a client."

"Yeah? Let's hear about it."

"Oh, no, no, no, Mr. Keogh. It is a delicate matter. I cannot discuss it over the telephone. No, that cannot be expected of me. Really not, Mr. Keogh. I must insist on that. I must speak to you in the privacy of your office. May I expect you soon?"

I was being a brass-plated dope, but it was my day for it. I said, "Okay, I'll let you expect me. Put Minnie back on."

When Minnie came back, I told her, "I'll be right in, but keep that guy in the outer office with you and keep your eye on him. He's slipperier than a pocketful of butter. Anything you want me to bring in for you?"

"A package of chewing gum?" she asked timidly. "If you wouldn't mind? Peppermint?" She was a dilly.

CHAPTER III

I FELT a lot better after I had a few beers at Charley's up on Market street. The sun was hanging straight overhead, and it was as hot and heavy as a brass bedpan filled with molten lead.

Freddy was sitting on the hard bench facing Minnie across the small office. The tips of his shoes barely reached the floor and he held on to the bench with

both hands, as if afraid of falling off. Minnie was typing, but her eye kept flickering over him. A literal girl, Minnie. She was keeping an eye on him.

He jumped up as I came in and when he smiled his little black butterfly moustache leaped upward toward the corners of his eyes. "Ah, Mr. Keogh," he cried. "This is indeed a pleasure."

He wanted to shake hands with me, but I had shaken hands with him before, and it was way up on the list of things I could do without. His fingers were soft and felt boneless and they crawled around the back of your hand like mice sniffing cheese.

I tossed Minnie a little paper bag containing three packages of chewing gum and said, "Here's the evidence in that Wrigley case. Please chew it over before you file it. Let's go in my office, Freddy."

She looked in the bag and her mouth popped open, but I just nodded at her and steered Freddy ahead of me into my office.

He was a real snappy dresser, was Freddy. He wore sport shoes, a mulberry suit with a white vest, a wing collar out of which sprouted a polka-dot tie, and he carried a fancy straw hat like Woodrow Wilson used to wear. His hair looked like wet licorice. Maybe that's the reason he wasn't wearing that hat. He was afraid it would stick.

He wiped the edge of the desk with his handkerchief before setting down his hat. I won't describe that handkerchief to you, but it looked as if he had dusted all of Newark with it before bringing it to my office, and his fingernails matched the handkerchief.

He took out a chromium cigarette case and with his thumb and forefinger he carefully extracted a card from it. "My business card."

After I took it, I found out why he had lifted it out that way. The ink

was still wet. It said:

APEX REALTY ADVISORS
APPRAISALS

No address, no telephone number, no other information, but it was typical of all Freddy's business cards. They were all Apex This, or Acme That, or Eureka Something else—and none of them meant a damn thing.

I propped it against the inkwell and said, "Very nice. Now suppose you decipher it for me."

He raised his eyebrows and reached out and delicately touched the card with his pinkey. "It is self-explanatory, Mr. Keogh. It means exactly what it says. I appraise real estate."

"That's wonderful—but I don't have any."

"Please, Mr. Keogh. I must protest against your hostile tone. I said I have come as a client and. . ."

"I said, 'Hold it a minute, Freddy.'"

THE door had opened behind him and Minnie stood there making frantic motions at me. She looked scared. I went over to her.

"There's a man," she whispered, looking back over her shoulder.

"Out there? Okay, sweetheart," I patted her arm. "I'll see what the man wants." She shrank back against the doorframe and let me squeeze by her.

There was a man, all right—and I didn't blame her for getting a little scared. He was as big as the business end of a steam shovel and looked just as hard. He was wearing a pair of tattered tennis shoes, filthy dungarees and a grimy blue denim shirt. The sleeves had been cut off raggedly above the elbows, and the collar had been just plain ripped off. He had a shock of brick red hair that ran from his eye-

brows down his back. His face was broad and good-natured enough, but nobody had bothered to shave it for the past four or five days and he didn't look like a guy who'd think it important enough to do himself. He lay on the wooden bench with his head on one arm and his feet on the other, and he was so tall his knees were drawn up almost to his belly. And he was drunk. He smelled like a burning bar rag. He was humming and snapping his fingers in rhythm when I walked in.

I said, "What's on your mind, brother?"

He looked at me, closed one eye and squinted with the other. "Me?"

"Yeah, you. Did you want to see me?"

He looked at me again. "Hell, no!" he said.

"Then what are you doing here?" I made it sound tough.

"Me?" He waved his arm loosely. "I'm just waiting, pally," he said airily. "Just waiting. Just hanging around. Just making myself comfortable." He grinned up at me, and even through the stubble, it was an engaging grin, of its kind. And, surprisingly, his teeth were as white as Spode china, and he had all of them.

I grinned back, grabbed his waving arm and heaved him upright. "Outside, brother," I said, giving another heave that brought down his feet. "You can wait in the gin mill. You'll like it better."

He looked surprised and took his arm away from me. He didn't tug or jerk—he just took it away, as if he had been merely resting in my hands, and I had a good, two-fisted grip on it.

"I told you, pally," he said reasonably, "I was waiting. For a guy," he grinned and jerked his thumb at my office. "When you get finished with him, I want him. And I ain't taking

no chances. That little whippet can run like a bloody nose, and I ain't got the wind for it no more. I'll wait here."

HE STARTED to swing his legs up on the bench again, but I slapped them down. I grabbed his wrist and elbow and swung him to his feet. This time I meant it. I got his arm up behind him. Minnie ran around us and opened the door and I shoved him toward it. If he hadn't been so damn heavy, I might have gotten him out before he recovered from his surprise, but I couldn't move him fast enough. He stopped short and pulled down his arm—with me pushing up with both hands and legs. He turned around, took me by the shoulders and lifted me from my feet.

"First," he said thoughtfully, "you was just nosy. Now you're a pain in the neck." He sat me down so hard on the bench my ears bounced. "I'll take that guy with me right now. The hell with this."

He turned and lumbered into my office.

Minnie cried feebly, "Are you all right, Mr. Keogh? Are you hurt?"

"Only where it won't show when I wear pants," I growled. My head spun a little when I got up, but I gritted my teeth and kept going. I was mad. I couldn't have been madder if he'd spanked me. I caught the doorway with both hands and hung on for a moment, looking into the office, shaking my head.

He was standing straddle-legged in the middle of the room, his head lowered, his eyebrows drawn down in a puzzled frown. Freddy was crouched with the desk between him and the behemoth, and in his hand he held a stubby, irritable-looking gun.

The redhead put out both hands and beckoned to Freddy. "Come on, pal-

ly," he said patiently. "Why make it tough for yourself? Put it down and let's go." He started slowly toward the desk. He went slowly not because he was afraid of the gun, but because slowly was the way he moved ordinarily. "Put it down now," he offered, "and I won't sock you in the snoot when I catch you. You can run around the room for the rest of the day and I won't even get sore. How's that?"

"I'll shoot! I'll shoot!" Freddy cried shrilly, but the way the gun wobbled in his hand, his chances for hitting North Newark were just as good as his chances for hitting the elevator operator.

Red was getting him in a corner, and Freddy had no place to go but out the window. And he might have. He was scared witless.

I took two long steps into the room and hit the redhead with the flat of my own gun. He said, "Huh?" and turned. I swung again and caught him over the right eye, then again behind the ear. His eyes muddled and his mouth hung suddenly slack at one corner and his knees started to part. I swear it took him an hour and a half to fall down. He went first to his knees, then forward to his hands. His arms slid out before him and he rolled gently on his side. I didn't want to hit him again, for even granite will crack if you hit it often enough. Freddy dropped the gun and started to cry.

I said, "Ah, for Crisake! Cut it out and give me a hand."

We had to drag him out. He was too big and too limp to carry. We got him out to the freight elevators and turned him over to two slightly bewildered Negroes, who kept saying over and over, "What *we* goan to do wid him, Mist Kee-oh? What *we* want wid him?"

I slipped them a buck apiece. "Send

him parcel post to Philly."

They grinned and said, "We frow him in the alley. How's dat?"

"Fine. But be sure you throw him hard enough."

I took Freddy firmly by the elbow and towed him back to the office, the way my old man used to take me to the woodshed, and Freddy was just as willing.

"Believe me, Mr. Keogh," he pleaded, "I am late for another appointment, and the gentleman will be sorely vexed—indeed he will be vexed—if I am late by as much as a minute."

"This is my day for vexing gentlemen," I said drily, "and I'm getting to like it. Now you sit down and tell me what these shenanigans are all about. Who was your soul mate?"

I LOCKED the office door and slipped the key into my pocket as he watched me over his shoulder with wide, apprehensive eyes.

"Well?" I said. "Who was he?"

He shrugged and looked sullen. I took a step toward him, and he jumped. "I do not know, Mr. Keogh," he said hurriedly, "Indeed I do not. He has been following me around for the past four days, and once this morning he actually chased me up Mulberry Street. I did not pause to ask about his menacing interest in me. Surely you can understand that, can you not, Mr. Keogh?"

I looked at him hard and suspiciously, but he didn't squirm, so maybe he was telling the truth. I went around the end of the desk and picked up his gun. No wonder it had shaken in his hand. The hammer was broken off and the trigger was rusted so tight you couldn't have pulled it with three men and a donkey engine. I gave it back to him with a grin.

"You ought to hide that thing," I

said. "Some guys get sore when you pull it on them."

He put it carefully into his pocket. "I have found it very valuable on several occasions, Mr. Keogh," he said earnestly. "The sight is usually enough to discourage violence. And I do not wish to carry a concealed weapon because of the penalties provided by law. And this," he patted his pocket, "cannot I'm sure be legally described as a weapon, concealed or otherwise."

I stared at him. "You're just about one of the foxiest little shysters I've run across."

He found that statement very pleasing and merely looked modest.

"Now what is this business that brought you here?" I demanded.

"A simple one, Mr. Keogh. We wish you to find a missing heir."

"Who's the other half of 'we'?"

"Surely it's not necessary to know the—"

"Who is he? I hate to know who pays the bills."

He sighed, then tossed his hands. "A Mr. Shatakhian, a countryman, an attorney." He leaned forward, smiling with his teeth only, "And a very difficult, irascible man, and I must beg you not to attempt to do business with him. Those were his orders."

"It's okay with me, as long as I get paid."

"Excellent!" He fitted his fingerends together and widened his smile. "It is Mr. Shatakhian's express wish that the heir be found at the end of a thirty day period. At the end," his voice sharpened, "for Mr. Shatakhian is an attorney of high professional integrity and wishes the estate—a matter of a few inconsequential tenements, a group of dilapidated warehouses, and a moderately prosperous delicatessen store, which, I fear, deals largely in policy numbers—to be in perfect order when

he turns it over to the heir. Is that understood?"

His smile ceased abruptly, as if he had pulled a string tightening his lips, and at the same time his eyes thinned and glittered at me. His hands were suddenly still.

This was the crux of it—this was the proposition.

They wanted me to hold off finding the heir until the pair of them had time to skim the cream from the estate, and it would look good for the record if they could say they had engaged a private detective to find the heir. That was just in case. That was the reason for that Apex Realty Advisors, Appraisals business card of Freddy's. He was going to get a rake-off for pretending to appraise the value of the real estate.

I PRETENDED to bumble over it. "Hell," I said, "sometimes it takes a lot longer than thirty days. I don't want to tie myself down to just thirty days."

"Anything over that would be entirely satisfactory," said Freddy smoothly. There was just a shade of contempt shadowing his smile.

"Now how's about a little bonus?" I went on.

The contempt slid away from his smile. "Naturally, Mr. Keogh, naturally. Five hundred dollars, of which I have been authorized to pay you one hundred on account—or shall we say, as a retainer?"

"You can say it anyway you want, as long as I get the hundred."

He said humorously, "Ha, ha, ha." He took a wallet from his inside pocket and hid it below the level of the desk while he took out two very crumpled, very dirty fifty-dollar bills. He closed the wallet, still below the desk level, and quickly re-hid it in his jacket pocket.

et. He laid the two fifties neatly on the edge of the desk just beyond my reach and beamed on them. He slid an oblong of paper across the blotter at me with his middle finger.

"If you will sign this receipt. . . ."

I looked at it. "It's not filled in."

"A detail," he shrugged. "I'll do it later when I have time. As I said, I have an appointment. . . ."

I put down my head and hurriedly scribbled my name to hide the quick flush of anger that must have burned in my face like a Roman candle. I didn't want him to see that. I didn't want to scare him off. Not yet.

He took the receipt, scrutinized it carefully and stowed it away in his clothes. Then, and only then, did he let me have the two fifties.

"At the end of thirty days, Mr. Keogh," he reminded me again. "Otherwise our agreement is void. That must be understood. Mr. Shatakhian is a very hard and difficult man if his orders are not obeyed implicitly and without question."

Yeah. And the hard Mr. Shatakhian. I had plans for Mr. Shatakhian, too.

"Now," I said, "suppose you give me this heir's name, occupation, habits, and so forth."

Freddy veiled his eyes and smirked at me. "Naturally, you must have that information," he tittered. "But unfortunately and to my regret, very little of it exists. He left his uncle's home ten years ago, and men change in ten years. All we know is his name. Moore," then hastily, "Moore, M-o-r-e. More. Goran just referred to him in the will as—'my ungrateful nephew, More,' to quote his exact words."

"A guy named More with an uncle named Goran. That narrows it down. It's almost as good as a photograph."

He looked at me sharply and decided I was kidding. He flicked a few in-

visible specks of dust from his moustache, patted his tie and rearranged the contemptuous leer until it might have been a smile. He stood and gestured at the locked door with his Woodrow Wilson straw hat. "If you will be so kind," he murmured. "I am already late for a very pressing engagement." He fluttered his moustache at me.

I had all I could do to keep from kicking him straight through the wall, right into the lap of the Scavengers Union—but I unlocked the door for him and gave him a big, fake grin. He opened the outer door, stuck out his head, looked up and down the corridor, then scurried out of the office.

I stared at the door for a long, gritty moment, then turned on my heel and went into my office. I slammed the door and walked heavily to my desk. I sat down and looked at the two fifties Freddy had left on the blotter. I ground my teeth, flipped out my hand and slapped them to the floor.

I was sore. By God I was sore!

I run a decent, honest agency. I don't handle finks or divorces, building what I thought was a reputation that would pay dividends. But so much for a reputation when a stinker like Freddy can walk into my office and brace me with a proposition like that.

I clenched my fists on the desk until the knuckles were pointed and white. I had made up my mind. I was going to do something I had never done before. I was going to doublecross a client.

I was going to do one of the quickest jobs ever known in the history of heir-finding!

CHAPTER IV

AFTER I had cooled down enough to talk a language a decent, up-right girl like Minnie would understand, I went out and said calmly to

her, "Get out that goddam Essex County book and start looking up all the stinking Moores. Call them up, every lousy one of them, and find out which ones had an old goat named Goran for an uncle. You'll get seventy-five to a hundred who'll admit it out of curiosity, but we'll weed them out."

"Why, Mr. Keogh," she said anxiously, "what is the matter?"

"I'm changing the name of the Agency," I said, "I'm changing it to Honest Dan Keogh. Then everybody'll know I'm a crook, instead of just mistaking me for one. But in the meantime, let's see how fast we can find this bird Moore."

"You ought to get yourself a nice hot cup of tea, Mr. Keogh. You're all upset—in this weather, too! I find tea very soothing and relaxing." She smiled tentatively, but looked ready to duck.

I didn't hit her or stand there calling her names, nor even stick out my tongue. I just said, "Thanks for the suggestion, Minnie. I think I will. I have a bottle of tea in my desk."

She said, "Oh, Mr. Keogh!" in a tone of voice.

I knew what she thought of liquor, because she had once told me of a cousin of hers who suffered from the curse of drink. He got drunk one night, threw a bag of tapioca at his wife and ran down the street in his underwear. The police caught him in a tree.

So I just grinned and said, "Irish tea, Minnie. Irish tea."

I went back to the office and took out the bottle of Old Bushmills I had bought that morning. When I opened the drawer I saw, sitting there beside the bottle, that box of cigars I had gotten for Flavin, and that was another thing I made up my mind about. Before I was finished, Flavin was going to

take that box of cigars if I had to feed it to him on a fork, leaf by leaf. Nobody throws back a box of ropes at Dinny Keogh.

Just like that, but make allowances for it. I was hopping.

I worried the cork out of the bottle and poured myself a small one—two fingers in the bottom of a speckled cheese glass. I sniffed it and held it up to the light, but that was just a case of conscience. I seldom drink during hours, and usually only with customers who come across with a fee big enough to make it unthrifty not to give them a drink. I sniffed it again, swished it around in the glass, then drank it very slowly. I poured another and drank it off without any hesitation whatever. That's what you call momentum.

Fortunately, I didn't have time to whip off too much of it. You can get going pretty fast on three or four schlucks of Irish before you know it.

The telephone rang out in Minnie's office and a moment later she squeaked over the annunciator, like Minnie Mouse, "For you, Mr. Keogh."

Don't think I'm putting it on when I talk about the annunciator. It's just a miniature P.S. system a customer rigged up for me instead of paying his bill. I'd sooner have had the dough. Annunciators don't buy fish and chips.

I picked up the phone and said grumpily, "Go ahead."

"Mr. Keogh?" asked a soft, casual voice. Not a voice with class, mind you, but a voice with enough throat in it to make it interesting.

I HELD the phone to my ear with my left hand and poured another Irish with my right, and said not quite so grumpily, "What's on your mind, Sweetheart?" I threw down the Irish a little too fast and coughed over it.

She laughed. "Drinking during of-

fice hours?" she mocked.

"How'd you know that?"

"There are all kinds of coughs," she said with the laugh still bubbling on her lips, "and that was one I'd recognize anywhere. Do you have a half hour free?"

"Or vice versa," I said encouragingly. "Sure, why not?"

"The Bel Air Apartments, Parkview Avenue, City, Apartment 3-A. Ring twice, then once. What are you drinking?"

"Formaldehyde—for a well preserved old age. Hey, is this supposed to be a social call?"

She laughed again. "In fifteen minutes." She hung up.

I hung up slowly, trying to figure that one out. She had a voice that said there was more to her, and that the rest of her could be friendly too—but, hell, I'm not one of the profile boys. I'm Dinny Keogh, the fat boy, forty and short-winded. So it didn't listen. There was more to it than just—come up and have a drink. And she didn't sound like a customer. She didn't sound anxious enough.

It wasn't until I was outside, riding up toward Parkview Avenue in the Agency eggbeater, that I put it what I thought was together. She had seen me once on the *Starlight Roof*, she had admired the magnificent curve of my stomach expansion, she had fallen in love with that homely, child-loving bulldog squeeze nature had put on my Irish puss, and she couldn't wait until she . . . like hell!

If I had thought more about her address than about the boudoir bubble in her voice, I would have been over the target. The Bel Air Apartments, Parkview Avenue, was a chippy's idea of paradise. It had a doorman with dirty white gloves, a canopy, a desk and a desk clerk (who never asked

questions), an elevator and a uniformed attendant, who drank gin. The bottle was behind his stool, only partially concealed by a copy of the *Newark News*.

The lobby was a little Byzantine, a little classic Greek, a little Gothic, and very strongly North Newark—marble, gilt, Oriental rugs, high-flung arches and a dissolute air of having been raided by the police too many times to get excited about it anymore.

"Three," I said to the elevator operator.

He hiccupped and stumbled into the car after me. He fumbled for the door lever, found it and tried to pull it off the door. He stared at the controls as if they were something out of Buck Rogers.

He hung on and enunciated carefully, "Froor, preesh?"

I took him away from the handle and set him on his stool. "I've always wanted to run one of these things," I said cheerfully. "Will it stop if I just say 'three'?"

He leaned toward me. "Wassat?" he inquired politely. He had been carefully trained—but not housebroken.

I stopped at three and let myself out. He was still sitting on the stool, fumbling around for the gin bottle that had fallen on its side and rolled to the back of the car.

That's the kind of place it was.

3-A was at the end of the hall—the apartment that overlooked the green, tailored lawns of Branch Brook Park—the green, in fact, on which Jamaican Negroes played cricket on Sunday afternoons in striped jackets and funny little hats.

I buzzed twice, then once, then patted my tie. After just about the right lapse of time the door opened and that throaty voice said, "Yes?"

THE eyes were gray and widely spaced and looked me over slowly, like smoke rising in a closed room. The face was broad at the cheekbones and angled down to a rounded chin, over which spread a wide, full mouth. Her hair was parted at the side and was the color of straw, imitation straw—the kind of imitation straw you find in nightclubs, made of spun glass. And she was tall—at least a half head taller than I—but not slender. She had plenty of everything, and in some spots enough for a banquet.

She wore a dark green silk house coat that opened over her breasts in a V that must have been slashed with a pair of hedge shears. She may have had something on under it; she looked as if she'd let me know when she got ready—if she got ready.

Her eyes were as cool and smooth as a pair of ice skates and twice as hard—eyes that knew the answers to questions that hadn't been asked, but would be.

"This is probably the famous Dinny Keogh," she said, with diction. "Please come in, won't you?"

Said the spider to the fly.

She walked ahead of me down a long and rather narrow hallway, postage-stamped on the left wall with a row of Dali prints, and led me into a living room that only a decorator could have loved. The colors were Victorian pink and chartreuse. The lamp stems were black-stockinged legs with garters and tassels. You pulled the tassels and the lamps went on. The furniture was curlicued and vine-leaved and the upholstery was zebra-striped. On the mantel over an ornate fireplace was a white hand with red fingernails holding something I'm not going to describe. Over against the bank of three windows, that leered out over the calm, bucolic park, was a modern portable

bar that looked like a trip to Mars.

"Please have a chair," she smiled—the chatelaine. "What can I make you?" She moved toward the bar, with hips.

The chair she waved me into had legs, obviously female, also black-stockinged and gartered. Hell, the whole thing looked like a dirty joke on the Victorian era. Me, I don't get that kind of humor.

"In here," I said sourly, "I'll drink Mickey Finns. Make it scotch and soda." It was the nearest thing to Irish.

I sat gingerly in the chair, half expecting it to yell "Rape!" the minute I touched it.

She came back down the room with a long scotch and soda for me and something green and oily-looking in a wine glass for herself. It couldn't have been absinthe. I don't think.

She sat on the sofa and crossed her legs. Just to give me an idea, I suppose. She smiled at me over the rim of her glass and sipped at whatever there was in it as delicately as a cat lifting a goldfish from its bowl.

"There wasn't any name on your doorbell," I suggested.

She said, "No?" and kept smiling.

"Do you want me to call you just plain Babe?"

"Why not?"

I DRANK of my scotch. It was good scotch. It was very good scotch. Only there was too much of it. She had filled my glass with it and just waved the soda bottle over the rim. People don't give away that much good scotch, at fifteen bucks a bottle, unless.

She sat there smiling. I don't think she was used to people talking into the teeth of her smile, but I did it. "It's no good, sweetheart," I said. "You didn't bring me up here to admire the

decorations, so give with the name and let's start in the kindergarten."

"Brenda," she said.

"Let's say that's your professional name. But what's the rest of it?"

Her eyes dropped a few degrees Centigrade, and she said icily, "Are we going to go into birthmarks and appendectomy scars, too?"

"Hell, no," I said. "This is kindergarten stuff, remember? We're just going to call one another names. And you'd better give me one I can believe. I'm not the police blotter, and for my money all the Smiths are in the telephone directory."

She nodded. She took a fresh sip from her wine glass and gave herself time to think.

"Suppose," she raised her eyebrows, "I said Johnson?"

"You're a liar," I said promptly.

"I was just supposing. It's really Raymond. Brenda Raymond."

You know those psychiatrist's tests in which they say "white" and you say "black"; they say "cow" and you say "moo." It was just like that.

She said "Brenda Raymond" and I said, "Simmy Underwood!"

She didn't look surprised. She didn't look surprised at all.

"You wanted to know," she said coolly. She sipped at her drink and looked at me with cat's eyes—waiting, weighing.

Brenda Raymond and Simmy Underwood. Who didn't know that combination? I had never seen her really close, but I had seen her with him plenty of times at the lush deadfalls around town, usually furred to the neck in the kind of skins that come from timid, retiring, expensive animals, jewelled with rocks that looked too big to be phonies. I knew they were playing house, but I'd never been able to find out where. So this was it.

I looked at the apartment with renewed interest, wondering whose taste it had been—Brenda's or Simmy's. He was kind of a plush guy at that, and it might have been his. She looked as if she'd run to the more obvious things like Vita-glass and chromium.

"Simmy's making himself unpopular," I drawled. "People keep calling on him and he's never home."

"Simmy went away," she said. "He didn't say where."

"So I heard." I put down my drink and stood. "I'm getting the hell out of here," I told her bluntly. "I'm getting too old to play Run Sheep Run with the cops. Ordinarily I don't give much of a damn, but I'm on the louse list already and I don't see any profit in it. Nor any future."

"Coward," she said in a genteel way. She kept smiling.

"Coward my aspidistra! I don't bowl in your league and you're not giving me a handicap. I'm going back to my beer and pretzels. It's plebian and all that, but it's comfortable. I'm dangling."

"Wait a minute." She held out her hand. "I wasn't playing fair and I admit it."

Oh hell, now we were going to start carrying the daisy chain!

"In the first place," she said, "I apologize."

"For sending Red up to my butcher shop?"

"For that—yes. Sit down. I want to talk to you."

I sat down, but stubbornly and on the edge of the chair.

"What do you want Freddy for?" I asked.

"That, my pet, I am not going to tell you. You were talking about profit before. Dollars and cents. All right. Let's talk about it." She pursed up her mouth, as if for a kiss. "Shall we

talk about it?"

"Why not? But don't forget, I still have enough dough to buy myself a carton of cigarettes. It'll have to be more than that."

SHE gave me a brilliant, curved smile, as rich as brandied peach preserve. Now she had me on the string, and she liked that. She rearranged the V of her housecoat, she didn't need that anymore, and her voice flattened just a little, the way a housewife's voice will flatten when she's bargaining for a basket of apples from a huckster.

"Five hundred," she said. "Five hundred for you, and you don't have to turn a finger to earn it. You don't have to leave the city, or rig a jury. All you have to do is tell me why Freddy went to see you. Five hundred and no questions asked—by you."

I gave it time to drift over to me and pulled at my scotch and soda while I considered the answer.

There was something wrong with her proposition, but I couldn't put my finger on it. She didn't have to ask me, and she didn't have to pay me. She could have had one of Simmy Underwood's rodmen slap me around for an hour or two. In fact, that was the kind of thing she was known for. And it wouldn't have cost her a cent.

The doorbell rang before I could figure it out.

Her mouth screwed up in a little twist of exasperation and she muttered, "Just a minute." She walked out with a long, free stride. No hips.

I heard the door open and her voice rise with a thin, whetted edge to it, from the hall. "Four o'clock," she said. "I distinctly said four o'clock. It's only two."

"Two-oh-five, to be exact, Miss Raymond." A man's voice, light but decisive.

"But I'm busy now. Please come back at four as we arranged."

"Oh no. Not at all. Not under any circumstances!" He laughed at her. "After you called me up, I naturally made inquiries about you and your past—ah—affiliations. It would have been stupid not to. And very interesting I found them, too. Interesting enough to have brought me here at two instead of not at all. But as for coming at four o'clock." He laughed again, and you could practically see him patting her arm. "No indeed, my dear. I don't trust you. You might have arranged one of your unpleasant entertainments for me, and I wouldn't have liked that. Now or not at all."

There was a brooding silence, and out of it she said ungraciously, "All right. You can come in."

She preceded him into the room looking sullen. He stopped in the doorway and gave me a brief, searching glance.

"A policeman?" he asked her. "I wouldn't have expected that."

I growled, "Relax. I'm not a cop."

Brenda Raymond bent over the end table and came up with a cigarette. She spoke coolly through a wreath of smoke. "A detective, a private detective. I think it would be better if you came back at four, under the circumstances, Mr. Mitchell."

Mitchell!

I GAPPED at him. I have a lousy habit of picturing people to myself before I meet them, and they almost never look the way I imagine them. Prize fighters excepted. They always do.

I had expected Mitchell to be either a hot-eyed zealot, or a sly politician using the Citizens League for campaign ammunition. He didn't look like either.

It was hard to say what he did look

like, exactly. A rather intelligent Capuchin monkey would come closest. He was short and wiry, a little over fifty years old, over or under, it was hard to tell because he had a wizened but not wrinkled face, and it was as brown as a jockey's. In fact, it was the same kind of face, when you came to think of it. His eyes were black and snapping under a pair of bristling eyebrows, and set over that was a head of angry gray hair. If it were not for his expression of malicious simian amusement, he would just have looked bad-tempered. His clothes were immaculate and conservative—gray suit, white shirt, wine-colored tie and black shoes.

But he had the look of a little guy who could be a hell-raiser if the mood struck him. He moved with smooth, quick, abrupt gestures, and the turning of his head was pecky, like a bird's.

"A detective!" he said. His eyes sparkled. "Well! Are you a good one, Mr. . . . ah? I've heard a private detective is sometimes an excellent person to know, if he's a good one."

"The name's Keogh," I gave him a card. It was free advertising. He looked at it with lively interest, like a monkey examining a new nut. "And a good private snoop is always a good guy to know."

Brenda Raymond stood watching us, her eyes as clouded as a mountain of thunderheads in a blue July sky. She walked over to the bar and poured herself another of those green ones. She threw it down with a quick, practiced tilt of her chin. Now she was being herself.

She swung around and said harshly to me, "Beat it while you can still do it alone, peeper. Go ahead. Hit the grit."

Mitchell grinned at her and wagged his finger in front of his face. "Wait a

moment, Miss Raymond. I've learned a thing or two since I've been in what is known as the public eye—a mote in the public eye." His shrewd eye appraised her. "If Mr. Keogh goes, I'll go with him. I've definitely made up my mind that a good private—ah—snoop might be an excellent person indeed to know."

She bit her lip. "I could have the pair of you thrown out!" she blazed.

I said, "Uh-uh," and shook my head.

Mitchell laughed. He looked at me with approval. He took out his wallet and gravely handed me a sawbuck. "I retain you, Mr. Keogh, to sit with me for the duration of my conversation with Miss Raymond. Is the amount satisfactory?"

I pocketed the sawbuck. "Eminently, Doctor," I said, "Eminently." We grinned at one another.

BRENDA walked down the room with long, angry, swishing strides. You could have ground beef with the look she gave the pair of us. She opened her mouth, closed it, turned and walked back up the room and stood at the bank of windows for a long, furious moment, her shoulders high and stiff. Slowly her shoulders relaxed and she turned. She smiled, but she had to tear her larynx to do it.

"All right," she said thickly, "but, goddam you, I'm sticking my neck out."

"And a lovely neck it is, too," Mitchell observed interestedly.

"It won't be so damn lovely if this talk doesn't stay private. You wouldn't be able to look at it without throwing up your lunch. Tell Keogh to breeze," she pleaded suddenly, "I swear to God, Mr. Mitchell, I'm not trying to cross you."

"Keogh stays." He was tough, that little man.

She closed her eyes. Maybe she was praying. Maybe for her it was praying. For she was scared. Her hands tightened at her waist and you could hear the knuckles crack. When she opened her eyes, she had given up. She sat on the arm of the sofa.

She drew her brows together and said in a low voice, "I'll put it to you this way, Mitchell. You want to be the next mayor of this town and I want—"

He held up his hand and shook it gently. "No, no, Miss Raymond, I do *not* want to be the next mayor of this city. Let that be definitely understood. I do not want to be the next mayor nor any other kind of mayor. Now you may proceed."

Both of us stared at him, and he sat there enjoying it with a little simian grin hoisting his face.

Brenda stammered in disbelief, "But . . . but . . ."

"I know," he said calmly, "I've heard the same gossip and I've even seen it printed, but I haven't bothered to deny it because it was so silly." He chuckled. "Consider, my dear, that from any point of view I would be the worst possible candidate any party could put up. In addition to a multitude of other short-comings, I've been divorced twice and I'm still paying alimony to both wives, greedy harpies. When I'm in funds, I like a bit of goatish play, preferably with brunettes—both my wives were brunettes, by the way—but these days I'm seldom in funds. My business was hit badly by the war and I'm scraping the bottom of the pot even to dissipate on an occasional bottle of brandy. However," he leered pleasantly at her, "if you know of anyone who is willing to, ah, gambol with me on the cuff, or even you yourself, why I would be . . ." He spread his hands blandly and looked willing.

I lay back on the sofa and sputtered over the drink I tried to swallow to quench my mirth.

Brenda Raymond said viciously, "Shut up, you noisy jackass!"

I COULDN'T contradict her. I felt like one. But still grinning, I went over to the bar and splashed a few fingers of scotch and soda into my glass and stood watching from there. He had stolen her thunder with that True Story Confession of his, and I loved the way she sat there trying to come up, groggy but still game.

"So you're not running," she said softly, persuasively. "But those speeches you've been making must mean something. You weren't talking just to make yourself unpopular with the City Hall boys. There's no future in it."

"Indeed?" He looked surprised and gratified. "I had no idea I was as unpopular as all that. I'll certainly have to make more speeches. But the Citizens League *does* have a candidate, Miss Raymond. We are supporting Ehrens for mayor."

"And you'd like to get him in?"

"Naturally."

"Then maybe I can give you some help." Her eyes glittered and she moistened her lips with the tip of a quick, pink tongue.

Mitchell cocked his head and said, "Ah?"

"I want to get out of this town, and I want to get out fast, and I don't want to walk."

Mitchell said, "Oh?" and waited. He was a counter-puncher.

"Well, you know what I mean, don't you?" she demanded peevishly. A little muscle at the corner of her eyes jumped and jumped again. "If I help you, I'll have to get out fast. Look at it this way. When Lonny Buttman,

the dope, ransacked your place and you knocked him off, you had something the voters could see and hear. It could happen to them—right? But you can't go on knocking off Lonny Buttman seven times a week from now until election. You have to keep feeding it to them, and it has to be strong enough so they can taste it. Suppose I could fill that hay loft of yours. That would be worth something in travellers' checks, wouldn't it?"

"It certainly would," he said promptly, interested. "But we'd have to have more than your unsubstantiated word for any charges—and they would be charges, wouldn't they?—that you'd bring."

The outside door rattled, then slammed. They stopped talking and Mitchell tensed on his chair. I put down my drink and faced the door, slipping my gun from under my arm into my jacket pocket and keeping it warm with my hand. Nothing worse than a cold gun.

It sounded like an anvil bumping over the floor, then Red lumbered into the doorway. There was a streak of blood across his forehead, where I'd gun-whipped him. He'd smeared it with the back of his hand and hadn't bothered to wash it.

He saw me down by the window and pointed, "You," he said. "You down there. Where's Freddy?"

Mitchell said quickly, "Who's Freddy?"

"An Armenian real estate broker." Brenda tossed it off. Then to Red, "Get out and wash your face, you filthy hunky."

HE LOOKED down at the bloody back of his hand, as if remembering, and mumbled, "Oh that. Yeah. Sure." He looked up and grinned at me in a friendly way, as if he didn't

hold anything against me personally. "You got me when I wasn't looking," he complained.

"On the forehead?" I jeered.

"That was afterwards."

Brenda said again, in a steel-puddler's voice, "Get out, you fumbling lout!"

"Okay, okay," he said peaceably, lumbering up the room toward me, but I was damned if I'd jump out the window. I waited. "Just a little drink, sis," he said, "Just getting a little drink. I damn near caught that Freddy coming out of pally's rat-hole here." He wagged his thumb at me. "But that little dago can run fastern rain down a window. I'm bushed."

"Get your drink and get out. Wash yourself for a change."

He stepped around me and winked as he passed. He poured himself a tumbler of rye. "Say, pally," he whispered from the side of his mouth, "suppose you and me try it another day when I'm looking? What do you say?" He looked over his shoulder at the granite-faced girl on the sofa. "I'm going, I'm going," he said hastily. He swallowed the rye as if it were asparagus juice and gave me another wink and a dig with his elbow as he shambled out of the room into what looked to be the kitchen, from the quick glimpse of it I got as the door swung behind him.

Mitchell said sharply, "Who's that man?"

"Red? You don't have to worry about him," she laughed. "Nobody worries about Red. He's big, but harmless."

Harmless! Maybe that was a woman's-eye view of him, but it wasn't mine. Maybe she hadn't been through the stone crusher, but the time would come if she kept nagging at him.

I wagged my head at Mitchell and

he kept a wary eye on the kitchen door. From there on, he wanted nothing from her but out. He wasn't a sardonically amused monkey anymore; he was just a scared monkey. It didn't show in his voice, and if you didn't see that quick glance of his flicker over the kitchen door, you wouldn't have known it from his face either. But he was a scared monkey, and he didn't like the company he was keeping. All of a sudden.

He stood. "You have documentary proof, Miss Raymond?" he said crisply—but like lettuce, wilted at the edges. "For ten thousand bucks, I have. Cash."

He pressed his lips together and didn't quite shake his head. "That's a lot of money, but I'll talk it over with Ehrens and his manager. They might think it worth it, after I tell them who you are."

"You're damn right it's worth it. And I'll tell you what. I'll go along with you." I didn't like the way her eyes shone when she talked about money. It made her ugly—and, worse than that, dangerous.

"Ten grand is *my* price," she was saying. "You can charge Ehrens anything you want and I'll go along with you as long as I get my ten G's."

Mitchell said "Right" just a shade too quickly, but I don't think she got it. "That certainly opens avenues of thought. Shall we go now Mr. Keogh?"

I said, "You bet," and put down my unfinished drink. I didn't want it anymore, not with knowing what was in the kitchen. I'm no hero.

BREND A bent her brows into an M over her eyes and said menacingly, "I still want to talk to you, Keogh."

"Not now," I said. "I've run dry. Call me up. Call me up any time this afternoon."

She called out, "Red!" He must have been listening at the door, for he was into the room between me and the hall before I could step out of my aura. She jerked her head at me. "Mind him," she said, "while I take Mr. Mitchell to the door."

Red grinned. "Well, what do you know! So it's going to be today again eh, pally?" He started toward me, but I had my gun out of my pocket and let him see it. I made sure he saw it. I wasn't taking any chances on astigmatism. He looked at it and said, "Ah hell." But he didn't seem to think it was big enough to stop him, and he was stupid enough to want to find out.

But it was the girl who stopped him—not me. She said, "Hold it!" She wasn't looking at me or Red. She was staring stiffly at Mitchell. He was holding a small, neat revolver, pearl-handled, and he was pointing it straight at her.

"Now surely you didn't think me naive enough to walk into a place like this unarmed, did you, Miss Raymond?" he said reproachfully. His voice suddenly snapped, like the crack at the end of a lazy curl of whip. "I don't want to shoot you or your companion, Miss Raymond, but if I have to I don't think I'd have much difficulty persuading the police it was in self-defense, do you?"

Red made a small, harmless, almost affectionate pass at me as I went by him. "For a fat little tub of guts," he grinned, "you're the damndest guy for getting out from under."

He still didn't hold any grudge. I could get to like him—if he were in a cage.

Mitchell and I took the stairs instead of waiting for the elevator and its drunken operator. He had come by taxi, so I rode him back downtown in the Agency heap.

He patted his forehead with a snowy handkerchief. "I had heard of such people, Mr. Keogh," he said, "but believe me, if I had known what they were really like, I would never have gone into that apartment without a full regiment of Marines at my back. Look at this!" He held up a brown, boney hand and it fluttered like a flag in a Memorial Day parade. "What were they after you for? Or is that a professional secret?"

I shrugged. "Something about a canary named Freddy, but don't ask me why."

That astounded him. "You mean you accepted a dangerous commission without realizing it?"

"Just a job of heir-finding, and it's not generally supposed to be dangerous."

It suddenly occurred to me that maybe Freddy was chalking himself up a double double-cross with Brenda Raymond and Red being left out in the cold, cold blast, and that was just the kind of thing they would get upset about.

I asked Mitchell curiously, "Are you doing business with those two comedians?"

"What? Oh, yes. Those people. But they didn't strike me as being comedians. Or was it Max Beerbohm who said, when he found his housemaid strangled in the lower hall—'What dangerous clown did this?' In that sense do you mean?"

"That's one way of looking at it."

"Well," he worried his underlip with his teeth, "I don't know," he said unhappily. "I certainly don't want anything more to do with them. Indeed I don't. But on the other hand, I feel it my duty to tell Ehrens of her proposition. That would be only honest."

"You could stay out of the picture."

"If only I could be sure of that!"

"Unless," I went on, "you have an

eye on that commission over the ten G's she mentioned."

HIS MOUTH slid sideways into his cheek in a wan grin. "Not that I couldn't use the money, and not that I wouldn't take advantage of the situation—but not with those people, Mr. Keogh. Frankly, I'm afraid of them."

"Oh, they'd be square enough if you handled them right. They need your dough, and they want to get out of town. You'd just have to be sure you didn't end up with a box of toilet paper instead of affidavits."

"No, Mr. Keogh," he said positively, "I've made up my mind. I'm going to tell Ehrens and wash my hands of it from then on. You can let me off at the corner of Halsey Street and Brandford Place. I'll see Mr. Ehrens right away. But why don't you handle it, Mr. Keogh?" his eye lit up again. "I'll surely recommend you as a man of resource, and my word counts for something, you know."

That I got. His word counted for part of any commission I could dig out of the deal, and all I'd have to do would be the spade work and maybe get a broken arm or two. But what the hell!

"That sounds like an idea," I said casually. "I'll give him a buzz. In about a half hour or so?"

"In about that time. Thanks for the lift."

I watched him cross the sidewalk with his sprightly, stiff-legged gait and disappear into the hallway of the Ehrens-For-Mayor headquarters.

CHAPTER V

I PARKED the car at one of the meters along the curb, picked up a pack of butts and walked around the corner to Market Street, thinking it

over.

Ehrens himself, from what I knew, was an honest character, a corporation lawyer, a member of the Children's Welfare League, a director on the board of a half dozen small banks, a heavy contributor to a million worthy causes such as the Newark Symphony Society, the Union of New Jersey Artists, the North Jersey Historical Society, and a lot of other long-haired things like that. Just the kind of guy the white-collar voters would love—and just the kind of guy who'd run a perfect fourth in a four-man mayoralty race.

If he didn't have the kind of ammunition Brenda Raymond was offering.

And he did have ten thousand bucks. He had a hell of a lot more than ten thousand bucks, and you can buy an awful stack of merchandise with that kind of money.

I went up to the office. I walked in, expecting a modest greeting from Minnie—only there wasn't any Minnie. Just a mess. Her chair behind the reception desk was empty. There were papers all over the room, the file drawers hung out like dog tongues, her typewriter sat drunkenly in the waste basket and the drawers of her desk were piled, empty, on top of her desk.

I said, "Hey!" and plunged over to my office door and flung it open. It was in the same welter of debris as the outside office, only there was more of it and worse. Worse because I kept my file locked and the drawers had been pulled out by the roots. The only survivor was the office safe, and it was lying on its side in the middle of the rug with a number of long scratches around the dial, as if a bear had been gnawing at it.

And there was Minnie, sitting in my chair, her hands tied to the arms and a greasy, red bandana handkerchief

spreading her jaws. Her eyes pleaded at me as I waded through the mess and quickly untied the handkerchief. She worked her jaws stiffly as I cut the rope that held her to the chair. The moment she was loose, she sprang across the office, her mouth still open, and washed it out thoroughly with water.

She looked at the handkerchief on the desk and said, "That *dirty* thing!" She washed her mouth again.

I started picking up the scattered papers and sorting them. "I suppose," I said, with some resignation, "our red-headed friend was frolicking in here."

"That horrible, horrible, dirty man!" she sandpapered her tongue with a paper towel. "He came in and demanded Freddy's address, but of course I didn't have it to give to him. He reached over the desk, picked me up and carried me in here. He told me if I screamed . . ."

"But did you?"

"Of course I screamed!" she said indignantly. "Oh!" Her eyes fled to the supplies cabinet in the corner of the room.

I grunted and heaved open the closet door and there was this guy lying on the floor doubled over, his hands and feet tied together with his own necktie and his mouth muffled in a pink, silk-looking thing.

MINNIE said in distress, "That's Mr. DePaul. He's in the office next door. He's a very nice man. When he heard me scream he—"

"Yeah, yeah," I said absently, unwinding the silk-looking thing, "but what the hell's . . ." I stopped. It was a pink slip, the side ripped open, the shoulder straps snapped. I looked at Minnie. Her face was the color of a split watermelon.

She took the slip, rolled it into a hasty bundle and put it behind her

back.

"He . . . he . . . needed something," she stammered, "and . . . he . . . he just reached up and . . . took it. But," the blush raced down her neck and disappeared, probably still going strong, "but he . . . he was a gentleman about it. As much of a gentleman as he could be. He . . . he apologized. What I mean to say is, he just . . . took the slip and that was all. Oh my!" She turned and fled.

I un-necktied Mr. DePaul and stood him on his feet. He gave me a long, green look and started feebly for the door.

I said, "Wait a minute, bud. I'll give you a drink. It's the least I can do."

"No, no thanks," he said in a muffled voice, "Thanks a lot, no thanks. I . . . thanks all the same, thank you." He went out. He was a big, heavy, muscular fellow, the kind who comes running when females scream, but from the look on his face, something had happened to shift his foundations and change his whole set of values. Red.

But it was just as well he didn't stop for a drink. I found the bottle under a mound of papers in a corner and it was empty. I'd had only two drinks out of it myself. I put it thoughtfully in the waste basket.

I suppose the phone rang, but I didn't hear it. Minnie's voice came primly through the annunciator, "A call for you, Mr. Keogh. The phone's been ringing all afternoon, but I couldn't answer it."

"Never mind, Minnie," I told her. "I'm going to buy you a nice new shiny trench mortar, and the next time that hooligan comes in, you can let him have it."

I picked up the phone, cradled it against my ear with my left shoulder and went on sorting papers.

"Mr. Keogh?" snapped a high, irritated voice, "Is this Mr. Keogh? Speak up, speak up. I've been calling you all afternoon."

"Is that so?" I said mildly. "I'm sorry you didn't get an answer, but my secretary was bound and gagged, the man from the office next door was knocked silly and thrown in my closet while a playful maniac tore my office to bits. The next time you'll get an answer. We don't have them every day."

"What's that? What's that?"

"Say what you want to say and get it over!" I roared.

He said, "Oh." And then more quietly, "This is Shatakhian."

"Oh yes," I said, "the other half of Shatakhian and Freddy, estate managers and heir-finders. I'm hard at work finding Mister what's-his-name for you. How are things with you?"

"I could have saved you a lot of useless work, Mr. Keogh." His voice was hard, tight and icy-cold. "We have found the missing heir, Mr. . . . ah . . ." There was a little mumble of voices and he came up suavely with, "Mr. More. We have found Mr. More, so I thought I'd call you before you put in any more time on the case."

I LAUGHED silently at the mouth-piece. "Don't worry about that," I said. "Freddy paid me more than enough. But where'd you find your Mr. More? Are you sure he's the right one?"

"Positive!" he snapped. "He's right here in the office. There's absolutely no doubt about it."

"That's bully!" I said heartily, "That's peachy, in fact. Could I talk to him for a minute?"

"I don't see any reason for . . ." He turned it off and opened another pet-cock and the oil flowed. "But certainly.

Mr. More, Mr. Keogh, the private detective would like to talk to you, Mr. More."

A heavy voice said, "This is Mr. More speaking." Very authoritative and frowning, like a butcher out of beef.

"Nice to meet you, Mr. More. What was your uncle's name?"

"My . . . What was that? My uncle's name, did you say? You want to know my uncle's name?" I could practically see the frantic wigwagging at the other end of the line. "My uncle's name was Goran—G-o-r-a-n. His first name was Stephen. Is there anything else you wanted to know?"

I said, "No, no. Thanks a lot, Mr. More. Drop around some time and we'll have a good laugh over the case. Let me talk to Shatakhian again for a minute." When Shatakhian came back I dropped my voice to the main floor, "Say, are you sure that guy's on the level?"

"Absolutely certain! There's no question!"

"Okay, okay. But I've been overpaid, see? So, I'll tell you what I'll do. Just to be on the safe side, I'll check up on that guy for you and let you know how he stands. No, no, don't protest, Mr. Shatakhian. Only too glad to do it, only too glad."

I hung up while he was still shrilling into the phone. My grin felt so wide I thought it would split my eardrums. That would give the boys something to sweat about—and after the day I'd had, I could use something to *laugh* about. I laughed.

I went to the door and said to Minnie, "Whenever that guy calls again—his name's Shatakhian—I'm out. I'm out checking up on Mr. More. Be sure you say that every time he calls—Mr. Keogh is out checking up on Mr. More."

She looked a little drawn as she said

obediently, "Yes, Mr. Keogh." She had her office all clean and tidy again, and I could see the little knots at her shoulders where she had tied her slip straps together again.

"Look, Minnie," I said, "why don't you go home and have a good dinner and tell me to go to hell. Why hang around. Go on, get out of here."

Her face took on that stubborn, conscientious look. "I can't right now, Mr. Keogh. I have a little more cleaning up to do, and if I don't get it done Mr. . . . oh!"

"Yeah," I said, "Mr. Keogh. But I'm Mr. Keogh. Go on. Go home."

She reached down into her desk drawer and pulled out the black rubberized cover for her typewriter, and I got out before she started being grateful, because Minnie stays grateful for half an hour at a time.

I WENT back into the office and called Ehrens' campaign headquarters, and after satisfying two-three suspicious voices that I was not going to try to assassinate the candidate by phone, they let him talk to me.

He said, "Oh yes. Mr. Mitchell spoke to me of that matter, and I am definitely interested. I was just on the point of calling you, in fact. But before I purchase anything, I'd like to satisfy myself it is worth the asking price."

"This isn't like a new jeep," I reminded him. "They won't let you run it around the block before you buy it."

"I understand that perfectly."

"Okay. I'll see what I can do. Maybe I can get some samples."

"That would be satisfactory. And, of course, you'll be well paid for your trouble."

"How much paid is well?" I asked bluntly. Hell, he was a politician, and you know what campaign promises are

worth.

He said five per cent. I coughed and he raised it to ten. I tried coughing again, but it stayed at ten, which after all, wasn't too bad.

Just before he hung up, he said in a voice he purposely made significant. "You will not find me ungrateful, Mr. Keogh."

What the hell was that supposed to mean? Was he going to make me Chief of Police?"

CHAPTER VI

I PICKED up the Agency heap at the parking meter just as a skinny cop, named Zeiss, had propped his foot on the rear bumper and was peacefully leafing through his book of tickets for a blank one. He's had a busy day. He looked up as I opened the door and gave him a Crisco stare. He said, "Oh, it's you, Dinny. Guess I didn't recognize the crate." Regretfully he put away his tickets. He was a cop with the writer's itch.

"I'm going to put a sign on it," I said, "CAUTION—DETECTIVE AT WORK. D. Keogh."

He puzzled it out. "I don't think that would be very smart, Dinny" he said earnestly. "Look, in your business, that wouldn't be smart at all."

That's what I like most about cops—their repartee.

I threaded slowly into the ant hill of traffic. I wanted to lie down on the studio couch, eat delicatessen and drink beer and reminisce about the wonderful time I'd had on my day off. My tongue tasted like a clam-digger's ankle. But hell, anyboy can go home. It's one of the cheapest pastimes in the country. And there was still a little more of my day off to enjoy.

I nosed the clunk out of the hysterical homeward-bound traffic at Park

Avenue and coasted into the shaded driveway of Branch Brook Park. It seemed cooler there. The declining sun splashed the green grass with longer and deeper shadows, and the brook muttered quietly to itself as the children poked their feet into it or sent small, tin, mechanical boats skidding eccentrically over its surface.

I stopped at the Bel Air Apartments. The clerk at the marble desk gave me a covert glance of commercial interest as I walked in. He smoothed his eyebrows with his thumbnail, then arched them at me. He looked as if, for a buck or two, he'd slip me the key to any apartment in the building, together with the girl's first name and, perhaps, a photograph. I looked bored and walked past him and back to the elevator where the attendant was sitting on his stool trying to read his newspaper through befuddled eyes that looked like boiled grapes. He didn't seem any drunker, but the gin bottle was empty, and lying on its side at the back of the car. He took me up to three, mumbling sourly to himself. His eyes seemed suddenly to focus as he opened the door for me.

"Two times in one day!" he said with alcoholic admiration.

I guess I wasn't supposed to know what that meant, for he suddenly closed the doors again, almost nipping my heels.

I gave the doorbell that Open Sesame ring of her's, but even after twice the usual length of time there was no answer. I rang again just to make sure, then let myself in. They must have bought those locks in Woolworths.

THE apartment was fancy, but it didn't conceal anything—or rather, didn't have any places where anything could be concealed. In the living room there was a small, ornate desk made of

writhing mahogany, the sort of design the Victorians stole from the French and debased. It had only two drawers. In one was a small, experienced-looking automatic, a .32, and nothing else. The other held a hand-tooled leather appointment book, entirely blank, three or four smutty letters from someone named Vicky, a fountain pen (empty) and a Mexican silver box of reefers.

I prowled into the bedroom, and noted with some surprise there was only one pillow on the enameled and gilded bed. Maybe Red spent his nights really getting himself drunk. Maybe that was his idea of a swell time. You can't always tell about these big guys. On either side of the bed was a commode, each with three drawers, full of lingerie and other feminine nonsense, and another gun, a big one, almost big enough for an under-carriage and mules to drag it around. I didn't have to be too shrewd to figure that one for Simmy Underwood's—and remembering his reputation as a chaser, it seemed very fitting to find it among the panties and brassieres. I grinned at it and recovered it with a black lace, embroidered pair of the former. R.I.P.

On the commode at the right side of the bed was a gold telephone, but I found the pad beside it more interesting. I'm bored with gold telephones. In the middle of a list of Louies and Joes and Mr. Mayhews was a little pearl—Shatakhian. I hadn't believed in him before, knowing Freddy. I had thought his name would probably turn out to be Hinkle, or something as remote from Shatakhian as Albuquerque from Schenectady. But there he was, telephone number and all.

I was copying it when a tried voice from the doorway inquired, "Waiting for somebody, friend? Hold your hands out from your sides and leave them there."

I held out my arms. What else could I do?

"Turn around," he said. "It ain't polite to keep your back turned to me that way."

I turned slowly. This apartment was no place to be foolish in. He was leaning against the frame of the doorway, a big lumpy man in a seersucker suit that was more crumpled than even seersucker has a right to be. His face was blotched and pimpled, his mouth thick and red and squashy, like a dropped tomato. A gun dangled from his forefinger, casually, as if that was the way he always wore it. He looked weary and cynical.

"You're a new one on me," he said, with a loose grin. "I thought I knew them all around here. What's the story, friend?"

As loose and sloppy as he was, something about his suety eyes told me it would be a mistake to try and take him. "I'm a friend of Miss Raymond's," I said earnestly. "I had business with her and came back to finish it."

"I can see that," he said. "I think you'd better move around the other side of the bed."

He gave his finger a little flip and the gun turned over and nestled into his palm. I moved around to the other side of the bed. He walked into the room and reached for the phone.

"What's that for?" I asked.

"I'm calling the cops, friend. You don't think I'm going to stand here propping you up with my gun all day, do you?"

Cops I didn't want. "Miss Raymond will be sore," I told him. "Why don't you wait and see?"

"Look, friend, tenants these days don't get sore. They grin and bear it. One of my jobs in this crib is to pick up strays like you. That's what I'm doing."

THE slowness with which his hand moved toward the phone told me what he was really after. "Okay," I said, relaxing. "How much?"

I think a flicker of interest lit his eye. I couldn't really tell; there was so little to go by. "You're a private eye, ain't you?" he asked wearily.

"So what?"

"I've got so I can spot them by their fingernails. This is a great spot for husbands playing hookey and private eyes. I've got a flat rate for private eyes," his grin was looser and floppier. "Professional courtesy. It's lower than the rate for husbands. A ten spot buys out, friend. But that's all it buys. And you know friend, sometimes I actually do have to call the cops. Think how lousy that would be for your reputation."

I said, "Why so cheap?"

He shrugged. He wasn't interested in my ideas of his market price. At that, he probably made out better with a small tithe; it didn't scare the trade away.

He took my ten and escorted me to the street door. The sweetheart at the desk didn't even look interested as we passed him, although he undoubtedly was the one who had given the tip-off. A wonderful place, the Bel Air Apartments.

At the door, Lumpy yawned. "Drop around anytime, friend. Sometimes I'm a handy guy to know. At retail prices." He grinned mirthlessly and walked back inside.

I felt sorry for him. When you're that far gone that you don't mind talking about it, it must be hard to live with yourself.

CHAPTER VII

ON THE way back to my own place I stopped at the corner delicatessen

and picked up a mess of potato salad, some rolls, cold cuts and the last bottle of beer he had. I set it up on my coffee table, sat on the studio couch and hunched over it with my elbows on my knees. I ate with a spoon because I was too lazy and tired to go into the kitchen for a knife and fork. The phone rang and I paid no attention to it, but it went on ringing and ringing until it began to sound like a woman shrieking out a back window at midnight. I ambled across the room to it, chewing on a piece of roll, carrying my beer bottle with me. I said, "Hello, hello, hello."

Freddy's voice leaped out of the ear-piece like a hatful of hysterical mice. "Mr. Keogh! Oh, Mr. Keogh! Whatever have you been saying to Mr. Shatakhian, Mr. Keogh? He's in a terrible mood. Whatever did you say to him to put him in such a mood, Mr. Keogh? I was with him a half hour ago and he treated me very harshly. Very harshly, Mr. Keogh. Something you said has lowered me in Mr. Shatakhian's estimation, Mr. Keogh, and he . . ."

I jiggled the phone a couple of times and the operator came on and I said, "I was cut off, operator." There were some mysterious clicks and jangles and she came back severely, "Your party has hung up, sir" I said, "That so?" and hung up also. I sat there, gnawing at my roll and swigging at the beer, and sure enough, in about ten minutes the phone rang and it was Freddy, back again.

I said sweetly, "Hello, honey. I was sitting here by the phone hoping it would ring again, dreading the long, lonely hours if it didn't. Why the hell did you hang up on me?"

He hesitated. "I had something to tell you. Where can you find that man. Mr. More."

"You don't tell me!"

"The—address is . . . 413 Midland Walk, Newark. Did you take that down, Mr. Keogh?" I said yeah, but he repeated it again, very slowly and very carefully.

I said dryly, "What kind of caper are you pulling now?"

"Caper? Oh, no caper, Mr. Keogh. Indeed, this is the truth," he said anxiously. "This is the truth. You believe me, don't you, Mr. Keogh. You must believe me!"

"So I believe you. Wait a minute." It came to me like that. "Did Shatakian shut you out of the deal? Is that why you're spilling this?"

There was a moment of shocked silence, then his voice came through very softly, as if he were crying; it had a whimper in it.

"Promise me, Mr. Keogh, promise me you'll never say a word of this to Mr. Shatakian. You have to promise me that, Mr. Keogh!"

I was saying, "All right, I—" when he hung up again.

I replaced the phone, reflecting that Freddy just wasn't cut out for the business he was in. He couldn't resist an easy buck, but he was terrified almost every minute of the time he was making it.

CHAPTER VIII

I DIDN'T have to go, and to tell the truth, I was half afraid this was another phoney rigged by Shatakian to get me out of the case—but I went. I went reluctantly, but I went, just on the off-chance.

Midland Walk was a cool, tree-laced street, and 413 was an attractive, white-painted Cape Cod cottage set back about thirty feet from the sidewalk. I pushed a small, discreet pearl doorbell that chimed briefly inside. Everybody has chimes, except me. My doorbell

buzzes like a fly in a bottle. It was dark inside, but the light went on over my head, and when the door opened, there stood Mitchell in a frogged smoking jacket. We stared at one another, open-mouthed. He said, "Mr. Keogh!" and I said, "What the hell!"

He recovered first, "Come in," he said. "Come in. I suppose Mr. Ehrens called you. He said he would. But you didn't have to come out to tell me. You could have called me."

I let him steer me into the living room and sit me in one of a facing pair of lounge chairs. The radio was playing *Clare de Lune*.

He said, "A brandy and soda? I'll be back in a moment." He trotted out of the room with his brisk step.

I sat there and scowled down at my hands. This was beginning not to make sense, unless someone wanted to get me out of my apartment for an hour or so, but that didn't make sense either. The apartment had been empty all day. Nobody had to make a point of it.

Mitchell came back with two tall, thin glasses, tinkling with ice. He gave me one, then set in the other lounge chair with his.

"You'll pardon my eagerness, Mr. Keogh," he said, "but what did Mr. Ehrens say?"

"He said just about what you'd expect a politician to say when he didn't want to come right out and say it. I'm to get a thousand bucks."

"Ah?"

"And I've been thinking it over," I went on, "and I think five hundred of that should go to you."

"But I did nothing, Mr. Keogh. I merely . . ."

". . . said a few important words that got me the job. It's worth that much to me. In good will, anyway."

He shook his head as if he wanted to refuse it, but didn't. "Thank you,

Mr. Keogh," he said in a low voice; it was hard for him to take, and still harder to come right out in words. "I . . . well, it's simply this, Mr. Keogh. I can't afford to turn down five hundred dollars."

"Who can?" I lifted my glass to him and drank. He was a funny little duck, peppery, not too honest, but I liked him.

He relaxed after that, and that little monkey grin of his sneaked up into his cheek and perched there and mocked me—or maybe it was mocking himself.

"Ehrens is not a member of the Citizen's League," he said, after a pause. "We're supporting him, and we know him to be honest. But frankly, we don't think too much of the men who seem to have drifted into his organization. Do you see what I'm driving at?" he asked abruptly.

I didn't and I said so. "But if you people feel that way about it, why don't you support someone else?" I added.

"No, no. That's not the point. Ehrens, personally, is a good man and we intend to keep on supporting him—with certain reservations. This information Miss Raymond has for sale is one of the reservations. We would like to see that information before it is passed on to the Ehrens-For-Mayor committee, just to have some assurance that it will be used honestly, and not to make deals with the opposition. We will have photostats made of it, then you can pass it on."

I NODDED. That seemed fair enough, and if Ehrens was as honest as Mitchell seemed to think he was, he wasn't being gypped. In fact, he was being safe-guarded.

Mitchell folded his hands under his chin and took a deep breath. "Now, what next I have to say, Mr. Keogh, comes hard. Believe me, it does. I

have faith in you but . . ."

I'm not sensitive. I can't afford to be. Like a snake, I've grown a new skin every year I've been in business, one on top of the other and now I have a hide like top grain leather.

"You don't trust me?" I grinned at him.

"It's not I!" he protested with an out-flung hand. "But I have to answer to the Executive Committee of the League. All we want from you, Mr. Keogh, is some assurance that the information obtained from the Raymond girl will go no further. That's only reasonable."

"Look," I told him, "the cleaner I want to keep my nose the less I want to stick it into politics. Have her seal up her stuff in a lead casket and I'll carry it over here on my back. You can take your photostats and reseal it. I don't even *want* to know what's in it. In fact, I'm better off if I don't."

"We couldn't ask more, Mr. Keogh," he said cordially. Then, "will you have another drink before you go?"

Mr. Mitchell wanted to be alone and listen to the radio. Don't ask me why. It was playing something very complicated and dull, probably by somebody named Bach. It usually is.

But I wasn't ready to go.

I said, "Do you live here alone, Mr. Mitchell?"

He looked puzzled but he answered, "No. My daughter and her husband live here also. It's their house, in fact."

"Is your son-in-law's name More?" "More?"

"Or Moore. There's a difference of opinion."

"It's neither. It's Chambers. But why?"

"I was sent here to find a man named More, or Moore."

"At this address? Are you sure?"

"The address was repeated twice."

He shook his head. "Your informant must have made a mistake. But I'll ask my daughter. She knows everyone in the neighborhood."

He went to the stairwell at the right of the living room, rested his hand on the newel post and called up, "Adele. Adele dear, would you mind coming down for a moment please?" He waited there until her light steps announced her coming. He held out his hand and looked at her affectionately as she took it.

She was very simply dressed in a white eyelet frock made of something like pique. She had a good figure and legs meant for something better than walking. She had a calm face, oval, with level brows, blue eyes and a nice smile, all framed by a madonna hair-do. The effect was very peaceful, like a firecracker before you light it. She looked explosive underneath.

Mitchell introduced us and she gave me her hand. She had a firm golfer's grip. She shook hands as if she played some game that required muscular coordination and decision, and she looked as if she were good at it.

"Mr. Keogh is looking for someone named More, or Moore." He raised his eyebrows at me and I nodded. "Do you know anyone by that name, dear?"

She frowned over it. "I don't think so, father. Is it a new family around here?"

"This was the address given."

"Someone must have made a mistake," said Mitchell firmly. "May I get you a drink, Adele? Brandy and soda."

"Just a pony, father."

"And you, Mr. Keogh?"

I SURRENDERED my glass and he went out of the room. The girl took a cigarette from a red lacquered box and fitted it into a sensible briar holder

and bent over as I held a match for her. She sat on the arm of the other lounge chair.

"There's a Midland Avenue at the other end of town," she observed, "Could it be that, do you think?"

"It could be. I've probably been given a bum steer anyway. A man named Goran died and left his nephew a pretty nice piece of property. I'm trying to find the nephew. We always run into a series of false alarms on cases like this."

In a funny voice she asked, "The . . . uncle's name was Goran. G-o-r-a-n?"

"Yeah. Goran."

She said, "Just a minute." She put down her cigarette in an ash tray on the small table beside the chair and I noticed her hands were shaking just a little. She went to the stairwell and called, "Warren! Warren! Are you asleep?"

A very sleepy voice floated down. "No-o." It didn't sound convinced.

"Could you come down a minute, darling?"

"Do I have to?" he grumbled peevishly. I didn't blame him.

She said, "Yes," firmly.

He grunted something that may have been profanity, but the general tone said he was coming.

She went back to the arm of her chair with her eyebrows drawn in and picked up her cigarette. "Of course. Moore," she said to herself. I wasn't supposed to answer, so I didn't. Mitchell came trotting in with a tray of drinks.

"I heard you call Warren, so I made one for him."

She said to him, "I had forgotten. About Warren's name, you know?"

He said, "Oh?" and handed the tray around.

"He changed it. It wasn't always

Chambers. It was Moorland."

Mitchell didn't say anything, but just raised his eyebrows and Warren came shambling down the stairs, holding a Navajo bathrobe around himself. The cord was missing and he had to clutch it at his middle. He gave me a sleepy, peeved glance and took the glass Mitchell held out to him. He was handsome in an olive, black-haired, cheeks-growing-heavy sort of way, but he was only half awake. He probably looked better after a shave and a shower—and out of that God-awful bathrobe.

Adele said briskly, "This is Mr. Keogh. He says your Uncle Stephan has died and left you his estate."

HIS hands stopped fumbling with the edge of his bathrobe and he looked sharply at me.

"Uncle Stephan?" He laughed harshly. "That's very funny." His smooth Levantine face fell into a net of lined bitterness. He stared down into his glass. "To Uncle Stephan," he said. His voice sounded like something you'd pick off a grave the day after Memorial Day. He laughed again.

I said, "Wait a minute. We'd better be sure about this before we celebrate. Could you tell me something about your uncle? Just to be sure, that is."

"His name was Stephan Goran," he said, giving it an unfamiliar pronunciation. "He had a delicatessen store. I hated him." His eyes seemed to be staring over us, stumbling among the wraiths of the past. "He knew all the gangsters and was always getting me jobs with them. I was chauffeur for Howie Stutz right up until that Saturday afternoon when he was shot down on Broad Street in front of the Firemen's Building. I was sitting right there in the car and I saw him come out with a little white package in his hands. Two men came up on either

side of him and shot him, and they kept shooting into him even after he had fallen to the sidewalk. They ran and nobody tried to stop them because they had guns. Up until that time I had thought gangsters were fun, were interesting, exciting. But that finished me. I got out of the car and walked away, and no one tried to stop me. That night I went to a hotel and registered under the name of Chambers and I've kept that name ever since, to cut myself off from Uncle Stephen and everything he stood for. Not because I think honesty is the best policy but because I don't think it's a policy at all, but just a better way to live."

He took a quick, quenching swallow from his glass and looked at his wife. "I told you about Uncle Stephen," he said, "I haven't concealed anything."

She said gently, "I know that, Warren. Don't upset yourself."

He looked at me and gave a small, gnarled laugh. "I said it was very funny, didn't I? Well it is. It's very funny because Uncle Stephen knew I wouldn't accept anything from him, dead or alive."

You could have poked holes in the following silence with your finger. Mitchell stopped with his glass half-raised to his mouth, his eyes spreading slowly like spilled syrup. Adele sat with her hands in her lap, her brows an arch of incredulity. And me, I just stared at Warren, the way you'd stare at fireworks that didn't go off after you'd lit it.

Adele said, "Warren!"

He shook his head at her, warning her. "No, Adele, no," he said. "I don't want it. If I had wanted it, I could have gone after it a few weeks ago when I read in the paper that Uncle Stephen had been killed."

I leaned toward him. "Killed?" I asked carefully.

"It was in the papers. He was shot and killed behind the counter of his delicatessen store as he was wrapping some sandwiches someone had ordered."

I swore softly and took a quick gulp from my brandy and soda. I should have known better than to have let myself in on one of Freddy's wild-cats, even on terms I thought were my own. I should have known there were worms crawling around in the plum he had offered me. But no, I had to be bright.

MITCHELL was saying in a reasonable voice, "But, my boy, your attitude is quixotic. Surely these build-ings must be worth a lot of money. Isn't that right, Mr. Keogh?"

"I wouldn't know," I said. And I didn't want to know. All I wanted was for Freddy to tell me about his little oversight in not telling me Goran had been gunned.

"I agree with father." Adele tilted her chin. "You're being foolish. Your uncle is dead. What harm can he do you now?"

Warren ran his hand unhappily through his hair. He made a small, vague gesture.

"Listen," he mumbled, "I told you how I felt about Uncle Stephan and . . . and what he stood for. I told you I didn't want any part of it, then or now. And I don't, Adele, I don't. Even just standing here talking about it has brought it all back again and it makes me feel . . . dirty."

"There's nothing dirty about the money," she snapped. "You can't afford to turn it down!"

"I know how he made his money. You don't." His face set stubbornly and he gave his bathrobe a little downward perk for emphasis. "I know we don't have much money, but we haven't been unhappy, have we?"

"I'd be happier if we could meet *all* our bills *all* of the time." She glared back uncompromisingly.

"No, Adele. My mind is made up."

She swept on, disregarding him. "And if you don't want to touch the money yourself, you can have father handle it for you. You'd do that for us, wouldn't you, father?"

Mitchell coughed. "Why yes, I'd be glad to, my boy. Anything I can do, you know. In fact, I might have suggested it myself—if I had thought of it." He smiled at his daughter.

Warren said, "No!" with finality and turned and walked to the foot of the stairs. He paused with his foot on the first step and looked at me. "Thanks for all the trouble you've taken to find me, Mr. Keogh," he said. "But I'd be very unhappy if I had to support my family on money made by Uncle Stephen. Good night and . . . thank you again." He turned and plodded heavily up the stairs.

Adele started to her feet, her face pinched and white with anger, but Mitchell put out a quick hand and stopped her.

"Let the boy alone," he said mildly. "Perhaps he'll think differently in the morning. And if he doesn't." He shrugged and smiled ruefully. "It's hard not to take money rightfully yours, but you'll manage. Don't let this legacy come between you and Warren. It's not worth it. Believe me, it's not worth it." He patted her arm. "Don't say any more about it tonight to him."

"All right," she said, "I'll wait until tomorrow." Her mouth was a tight crease. "Good night, father. Good night, Mr. Keogh." She gave each of us a brief nod and walked from the room, her back stiff and straight.

I pushed myself out of my chair and when Mitchell turned back to me I

was ready to go.

"A short brandy before you go, Mr. Keogh?" he suggested half-heartedly.

I shook my head. I had business to do and I wanted to get it done before bedtime started looking like something that had happened last spring.

He went to the door with me. "Give Warren a ring in the morning," he suggested. "Give him time to think it over."

"Sure. What the hell. I think he's off his apple, but it's his business. I don't make a nickel out of it either way."

We shook hands—his was surprisingly firm and cool, a quick shake and a quick break.

He smiled. "And—good luck on that other."

I told him not to worry about it and went down to my car at the curb. Me telling him!

CHAPTER IX

I DIDN'T know where Freddy lived, but I knew at least half a dozen places where I might find out. I'd seen him several times in Charley's on Market Street, in furtive corners talking in significant whispers with stupid-looking characters, who usually dug into their pockets and fished out their rolls when Freddy got finished charming them.

I had a lot of questions I want to ask, and I had an idea he wasn't going to be ready to answer them and I also had an idea that it wasn't going to make a hell of a lot of difference how he felt about it.

I cut over to Mt. Prospect Avenue. I wasn't in any mood for drives through the park. I just wanted to get where I was going.

The cops were probably digging into the Goran killing right that minute, and it was going to look sweet for me to be

mixed up in it in any way. If you know the heir-finding racket, you probably realize what a lousy, crooked thing it can be. And, don't worry, the cops know it, too. Add a murder to that, and it smells even sweeter, especially now that the whole Force was out trying to be heroes for the newspapers.

Charley's is always crowded and noisy at night. The juke box was beating the brains out of *Night And Day* over in the corner, and there was the usual assortment of loud-talking characters in suits that cost too much money and fitted too quickly in the waist; a couple of headquarters dicks off duty quietly taking in rye with their mouths and the customers with their eyes; a pair of young kids and their girl friends, giggling up and down on their bar stools, loudly jeering at the NO DANCING sign tacked up over the cash register, but doing nothing about it.

I slid onto a stool in front of the beer taps. Charley was bustling up and down behind the bar, trying to talk to everybody at once, and making a good job of it.

He worked his way down to me and grinned, "A stein of slops? Or are you on an expense account? Hiya, Dinny?"

"Hi, Charley. Make it slops. Seen Freddy around tonight?"

"Freddy?" He knifed the suds from the top of the glass and pushed it over the bar at me. He wiped his hands on his apron. "Let's see now. Not tonight, Dinny. He was in yesterday with a skinny-looking creep with a face like a stucco wall, and they spent half an hour and twenty cents, jabbering Chinese or something at each other."

"Shatakhian?"

"Come again?"

"Was that the guy's name?"

"Hell, how would I know? You know Freddy when he clamps on a sucker.

He's like a cat with a new mouse."

I didn't reach for my beer, for he'd have been gone the minute I stopped talking. He was beginning to inch away already. I said, "What's Freddy's address? If I can see him tonight I can save myself twelve hours."

HE LOOKED at my face an inch at a time. He took a folded towel from under his apron string and carefully wiped the bar in front of me, as if he were Simonizing a gold-plated Duesenberg. "How much he take you for?" he whispered.

"Nothing like that, Charley. You know I never went for that swift-dough talk of Freddy's. I just have to see him about a little business."

"I had to make sure, Dinny. You'd be surprised the kinda guys coming in here asking for Freddy with blood in their eyes."

"Nothing like that," I lied.

"Well," he lifted my glass and polished the spot under it, "if you was to go to the 24 Jebb Street, first floor, and Freddy was to answer the door and you said you was selling chances on a plate glass shooting gallery, how would he know I sent you?"

"He wouldn't," I agreed. "Anyway, Freddy and I are too friendly to ask questions like that of one another."

He tucked his towel back under his apron string, and his eyes went bleak, as if I had reminded him of something unpleasant that stank.

"Speaking of friends," he said coldly, "a couple of yours were in tonight. We got rid of one, but the other's still here."

"You never have to get rid of any of my friends, Charley. They're all quiet boys, chess players or flower lovers."

"This guy was no flower lover, the way he smelled. He comes in filthy dirty, big as the north side of Grand Central, a red head. Him and a dame.

They sit over there and he starts rearranging my place so he'll have room for his big feet. Then he wants me to bring him beer in a fire bucket. I take the mallet I use for the ice and tell him if he leaves quiet, maybe me and the fire department if necessary won't throw him out on his can."

I grinned a little and shook my head. "That sounds like a proposition that would have interested him."

"Yeah." Charley looked frustrated. "The stupid yap actually looked as if he wanted to try it just to see what would happen, but the dame sent him home to wash himself. He was scummy, Dinny, scummy, and he had a smear of blood across his face that must have happened two-three days ago."

"He's no friend of mine, Charley. I'm the one who put that blood on his face."

"All by yourself?"

"He said he wasn't looking."

"Aah, you threw a brick at him outta fifth story window." He was feeling friendly again. "You know some pretty funny crumbs, Dinny."

"They're not funny, that pair. Is the dame still here?"

"In the corner. . . . All right, all right," he yelled down the bar at a noisy customer. "So you want beer. What do you want me to do, go down on my knees and thank you?"

The customer yelled something back, but that was the way it went at Charley's.

I picked my beer off the bar and said, "See you later, Charley," and ambled over toward the corner.

BRENDA RAYMOND, in a white strapless evening gown that gave her one hundred percent coverage—in advertising—was sitting at a table in the back corner with a short, dark man, who looked as if he had been polished

with olive oil. I'd seen him around the Hall several times, but mostly he hung around the court house. He was one of the lads who manipulated bail for the trouble boys when they slipped. His name was Petey.

Brenda raised her head when she saw me coming and waved. At ten feet in that dim light, she looked as lovely as anything I had ever seen or had dreams about, but when I slid into the bench opposite her at the table I saw that she was drunk. Not just plain drunk, but sluttishly, sottishly soused, and she looked like what she was, an avaricious dame on the down-grade. Her eyes were puffy and the skin was mottled yellow and purple beneath them; lines ran from the sides of her nose and pushed down her mouth.

Petey had his right hand under the table, and from his shad-bellied look at me, I knew damn well he wasn't patting a dog.

He said, "'Lo, Keogh," in a bored voice.

She slushed, "Where you been? I been looking for you. Called you up. Went over to your office. Where you been, damn you." She called me a string of names I have never seen printed even on privy walls. And the worse she got the more pleased and reassured Petey seemed.

He whispered to her, "Le's go up to your place, honey, and have a drink of good liquor where it's private."

She jeered at him. "Any time," she said, "any time I catch myself in a place with you where it's private, I want somebody to take me out and shoot me. Take your hands off me!" she spat. "Go on."

But he just sat there and grinned leanly at her but didn't move his hand from under the table.

Just listening to them made me feel as if I'd been bathing in the drainage

canal of a slaughterhouse. "What did you want to see me about?" I said shortly. I wanted to get out of there and away from them. Hell!

"Talk to you?" she repeated stupidly. "See you? Thass right. I wanted to talk to you. I remember now." Her face sharpened and her eyes took life from behind their glassiness. "Listen," she said, "I want you to tell Mitchell I've upped it another ten grand, and you tell him he'd better grab it at that price while I'm still soft-hearted, or I'll up it *another* ten grand. Now what do you think of that?" She sneered triumphantly.

"Not much. Mitchell doesn't have anything to do with it. You're dealing with Ehrens—through me. And And you can forget about that other ten grand."

PETEY'S bright black eyes darted from her to me, and he casually took his arm from under the table and lit himself a cigarette.

She said heavily, "Ehrens! Who the hell's Ehrens. I don't have nothing to do with Ehrens. Mitchell's the boy I talked to this afternoon and Mitchell's the boy I'm going to deal with. You can tell that to Ehrens with regards from me." She gave me her regards, which were also unprintable.

"Okay," I said patiently. Why should I argue with a drunk? "So you're dealing with Mitchell."

"You're damn right. How'd Ehrens get into this, anyway? Who asked for Ehrens. You tell Mitchell I'm wise, see. You tell him the best politician in the world can't get away with anything with me. You tell him that. And you tell him I've tilted the pot another ten grand. You got that, Dinny Key-hole?" she giggled. "There's a name that fits you, snooper. Dinny Key-hole, the peeping snooper."

I was getting tired of this, and what was worse, it wasn't getting anybody any place. I shoved myself sideways away from the table and left my beer sitting there. "Sober up and we'll talk about it tomorrow," I said, making it nasty. "Right now I want to go home and wash myself with sheep dip."

She jerked around and faced Petey. His hand had slipped again. "Damn you!" she cried furiously. She threw her drink in his face and gave him a powerful shove that threw him on his back between the tables, then jumped out and kicked at him with her spike heels. He yelled and Charley came running with the mallet.

The girl snatched her bag from the table. She stood weaving, and gave Charley a hot glance of defiance. "I'm going home," she announced loudly. "I'm going home and I'm going to bed—alone, even if it takes the whole damn Marine Corps to put me there!"

She stumbled toward the door.

Charley called after her, "Hey, ain't you forgetting something?" He jerked the whimpering Petey to his feet.

The girl looked at them with disdain. "Keep it," she said. "Keep it and put it in rat traps."

Charley shook his head at me. "As a personal favor, Dinny," he said reproachfully, "I think it'd be a better idea if you done your business in your office from now on."

CHAPTER X

THE dusty, exhaust-laden air of Market Street tasted clean and sweet. A hot, thirsty breeze drank at the juices of the sweating passersby, but to me it felt like the brush of an angel's wing. The huge yellow busses poured out their fumes in the snarling bass roar of their motors, but to me it was Casals playing Shumann on the

cello, or Chaliapin singing *The Barber of Seville*.

Just by contrast, just by contrast.

If I'd been in any other kind of business, I'd had been a home-loving husband, with two-three kids and a lawn I could water, standing out there every evening in my undershirt, with maybe a little wood-working shop in the cellar.

But that's just a dream. The only nail I had ever hammered was on my own thumb.

I had left the agency eggbeater in a parking lot over on Washington Street, so I walked the half mile to Jebb Street at the other side of the Pennsylvania Station. It was not a night for walking, and I was soaked with sweat when I got there. But it was a good, honest sweat, not just something you worked up squirming around in a rat-hole.

And, funny, I wasn't mad at Freddy anymore. I felt almost benevolent, in fact.

Jebb Street was a block long, ending shabbily against the railroad embankment, a bog of small, narrow houses, most of them with rickety wooden stoops, usually lacking a step here and there, all of them gnawed gray from the bite of the wind and rain. The night was hot and the front doors stood open to allow the sooty air to seep into the dank hallways. On a few of the larger porches, people were lying on army cots in their underwear, the covers thrown aside in the oppressing heat. Heaped and battered garbage cans stood at crazy angles along the curb, and skeletal mongrel dogs had tipped several of them into the gutter and were noisily nuzzling their bonanzas. As I walked up the street, out of one of the shadow-masked doorways came a quavering, ecstatic, "Oh, Joey!" and faded into the dark.

Number 24 Jebb Street was distinguishable from its neighbors by having

no porch at all, giving the appearance of an incomplete autopsy. I sprang up into the hallway through the open door and wrinkled my nose. It smelled like a wet mattress and the floor gave with sodden weariness under my weight. I lit a match and found a neat white card tacked on the first door with straight pins. It said, F. Askian in flowing, elaborate script. It sounded and looked like Freddy.

There was no slit of light under the door and I swore mildly. I knocked because I had gotten into the habit of it, then felt for the doorknob and pushed, not really expecting it to open. People like Freddy rarely leave their doors unlocked. But it swung inward and I stepped into the room, feeling up the left wall for the light switch. The room had a cloying odor of incense, the kind you buy in sticks in Chinatown, heavy, sweet, penetrating. The light came drearily from a single bulb, hung on a single cord from the center of the ceiling.

I HAD expected Freddy to live in cheap quarters, but this was even more squalid than I had imagined. Sticking out from one wall, squatting almost on the floor on bulbous legs, was a heavy wooden bed with tumbled, soiled sheets and a single Navy blanket. It wasn't set quite squarely to the wall, but stood out about six inches on the headboard leg. The shade was drawn on the window, and beside that stood what used to be called a chiffonier with a cracked mirror. On that stood an opened can of Campbell's beans with a jagged lid, a plate with a knife and fork and a torn slice of bread. In back of that was a bowl of unidentifiable fruit, dark, wrinkled and with little woody stems sticking out of them. There was also a stack of twenty or more brand new packages of dirty post-

cards, which Freddy was probably selling as a side line. The rug was something the Salvation Army would have refused with justifiable disdain. The wallpaper had faded into grimy reminiscence, dreaming its pattern behind years of dust and dirt.

I closed the door and stepped more deeply into the room. A quick inventory found a shoe, and in the shoe a foot and an ankle. It stuck out from the far side on the bed behind the bulbous leg on the floor. I looked at it very carefully. It didn't look like a foot that was going to do any more traveling. It lay at a very peaceful angle, entirely without motion. You have no idea of how completely the human body can achieve immobility unless you've seen a dead one. It seems, even at first glance, to be more still than even a rock or a mountain, possibly because you expect motion from it. I couldn't see the trouser leg, but I was willing to bet the color of it would be mulberry.

It was.

Freddy lay on his back with his mouth so widely agape I knew his jaw was broken, and his head lay at such an angle you could tell nobody could do it even with practice, unless he had a broken neck. His arms lay comfortably across his stomach, and his legs were crossed so that the leg of the bed hid his left foot. I looked down at him without even attempting to feel for a pulse or heartbeat.

Freddy was as dead as he ever would be, and you can't be any deader than that even if you made a life work of it.

There wasn't anything in the room to tell me what had happened. Sometimes a scuffed rug, a toppled chair, a broken lamp will tell the story of a struggle, but Freddy's room just looked, for him, normally untidy. I dusted the room with my eyes and

picked up a telephone. It was concealed in a stack of fake books, such as department stores used for display purposes, and the rat-tail of wire sticking out behind one tipped me off.

The police could wait. If I hadn't happened in, they might have had to wait till the rent was due, so the hell with them at the minute. I had work to do. I jerked open the chiffonier drawers, but they held nothing more than the rest of Freddy's eccentric haberdashery—some violent and angry shirts in snarling hues with socks to match and about thirty bow ties in patterns resembling expensive goldfish. In the closet beside the head of the bed I found two more suits, one mustard yellow and the other lavender, a pair of patent leather shoes curled up at the tips and another pair of sport shoes with built-in heels, which would have made him just about half as tall as Joe Louis.

Stacked in a corner of the closet on the floor were six dice cages, elegant in chromium and ebony, such as were used in chuck-a-luck in the fancier gambling houses, where no one is permitted to take your money from you unless he wears tails or a dinner jacket. The matching layouts, inlaid in ivory and ebony, were wrapped carefully in newspapers.

This was a new and ambitious line for Freddy. Before, he had stayed just within the law in his other enterprise—that is, he always had a perfectly legal answer ready. The D.A. might have thought differently if anybody had made a point of it. But it would take more than a glib tongue to explain away those layouts. Hell, they must have cost a hundred bucks apiece the way they stood, and that's nothing you'd take home to amuse the neighbors on a Saturday night. Freddy had definitely crossed the line.

I gave the room one more dusting without turning up anything more interesting than a stack of unused policy numbers—then called the cops.

I WAS sitting on the front step, smoking a cigarette, when they rolled up like a circus parade—sirens screaming, red lights flashing and brakes squealing as they swooped to the curb in front of the house. The cycle cops kicked down their rests and stood there, gauntleted and legged, while out of the squad car loafed two men in plain clothes. They screwed their cigars a little more tightly into their mouths and sauntered casually across the sidewalk.

Kruger and Flavin.

Cigars, I thought, cigars. You'll eat cigars before this is over. I stood and said aloud, "Still grinding it?"

Flavin looked at me without surprise. "Keogh," he said, "Well." He took the cigar from his mouth and spat. "We had another shake-up this afternoon and we pulled Homicide out of the hat. But just so we wouldn't get to feeling too good, we're on twenty-four hour duty. Hear you have a stiff?"

I said, "Inside."

Ten minutes behind them came the medical examiner, a new one on me, a young one with a sullen expression and an air of being twice as busy as anybody else. He gave us one of those quick clinical glances doctors give non-doctors and bent over the body at the other side of the bed.

Flavin tilted his chin at the stiff and said to me, "Friend of yours, wasn't he?"

"Just business. I don't hang around with guys like that unless I'm paid for it. You know me better than that, Joe."

Kruger said liplessly, "This punk has been playing around with Mitchell, and tonight he was in Charley's with that

Raymond twist who was Simmy Underwood's Dutch wife for two years. Lee and Hansen were in there and saw them. But now he don't know from nothing like this morning. Me," he said, ripping me with a vicious glance, "I think he could be made to remember better."

Flavin said interestedly, "That so? Think Kruger's got something there, Keogh?" He got up from the bed and looked at his heavy-fingered hand. "Let's find out."

I was against the wall. I wasn't going to argue with the law, not with a roomful of it inside and a street full of it outside. I'm not that dumb. When he grabbed me, I just let myself go limp instead of wrestling with him.

He said, "Hey!" in surprise and tried to hold me up by the lapels.

I sat on the floor. The M.E. looked up over the edge of the bed and frowned. "Take him outside if you want to play," he said in a tough voice. "I have a report to make."

Kruger snarled, "You lousy—" and let go a kick that would have torn my head off if Flavin hadn't crossed his thigh on Kruger's calf—and if I hadn't been under the bed by that time. Hell, I'm no hero.

"What do you want to mark him for?" Flavin asked with mild professional reproach. He reached under the bed and hauled me out. "Come on out, you fat chiseler," he said. "He won't hurt you."

"All by himself he wouldn't," I was running short in temper. "It's the hired help he'd call in when the going got rough."

KRUGER growled something in his throat and tried to get around Flavin at me. I scrambled to my feet. If it had to be like this, I was going to let that guy have it.

The M.E. said petulantly, "I can't work under these circumstances. Either take that man outside and question him, or I'll make a formal complaint to the Commissioner."

Complaints to the Commissioner aren't things you can toss in your breakfast cereal, and an M.E. is a professional man, but a detective is still just a cop.

Flavin said, "Right," without rancor. He shoved his hand on my chest and sat me on the edge of the bed. "We can take you outside, so let's stop playing horse. Let's hear it, Dinny, and we can stay friends."

Kruger's face was the color of mutton fat and his eyes were glassy; there were little bubbles of sweat across his upper lip. He didn't make a sound. He didn't seem to be even breathing. But I still thought he'd stay buttoned, and I turned back to Flavin. I didn't even see him swing. His fist caught me at the end of the jawbone and I went back across the bed. A little foggily, I heard the M.E. snap, "Damn it!"

Flavin said quickly, "It's okay, Doc. He slipped. It won't happen again." He looked at Kruger. "By God . . ."

I sat up slowly and touched my face with cautious fingertips. I could taste blood. Kruger gave me a thin, bony grin and leaned against the wall and lit a cigarette.

I knew now I had to get my story over before the M.E. left. I gave them the background.

"Tonight," I wound up, "Freddy called and told me where to find this guy he called Moore. Freddy was working with a shyster named Shatakian who didn't want the heir to turn up for a little while, but Freddy crossed him up."

Flavin said, "Shatakian!" He whistled. Kruger's mouth dropped open a little, but he quickly closed it, shaking

his head. Flavin went on. "We're looking for Shatakhian for another job. He tried to shoot a bird in his office this evening but he missed the first one. The guy scrambled out of the office and was half way down the street before Shatakhian could get in another shot. He nicked him in the arm. A deep-spoken guy; looks like a banker. He tried to bluff it out when the beat cop picked him up on the corner with the blood running out of his sleeve. Shatakhian had beat it in the meantime. He's on the air, but we haven't picked him up yet."

"Deep-spoken? Maybe that's the— Look, Shatakhian called me this afternoon and put a guy with a voice like that on the phone. This guy claimed he was the missing heir, and Shatakhian tried to call me off the case. That could be the one you got."

Flavin nodded. "Could be. We'll put it to him."

The M.E. got up from the other side of the bed, dusting off his knees. "Do you want to hear the report or don't you?" he asked coldly.

Flavin said casually, "Shoot."

"I'll make it simple. This man's neck was broken and his jaw fractured. Slight contusion on the left temple, probably the blow that knocked him unconscious, but even at that terrific leverage must have been applied. Carry on." He picked up his little black bag and marched out of the room as if the bugles were playing.

Flavin screwed up his face and took his lower lips between his teeth. He stared at the body on the floor. His eyes flickered over me. He sighed. "Dangle," he said. "Dangle before I change my mind."

I stopped at the door. "Have you figured Simmy Underwood in this?" I asked.

Flavin said, "Yeah, but he dangled

too." He waved me out.

I didn't waste any time. I went.

CHAPTER XI

I WALKED into the apartment. It was cool. I'd had the windows down and the shades drawn all day. It smelled a little stale, but it was better than the drooling heat outside. I was tired. I dropped my coat on the floor, my pants beside it, I threw my tie and shirt on a chair. . . .

The telephone began to yell its head off.

I stood there with my foot half raised, taking off my shoe. I blinked at the phone, and it kept shrilling like a bluejay swearing at a cat. I picked it up and mumbled, "What is it now?"

It was Adele Chambers. She sobbed into my ear, "Mr. Keogh, oh Mr. Keogh, please come over, please come over, right away, I don't know what to do, please. . . ."

"Easy now, easy, Mrs. Chambers," I soothed her. "Just tell . . ."

She broke in hysterically, "Oh, come over, Mr. Keogh. Please come over, please. . . ."

I said wearily, "All right. I'll be over as soon as I can."

I hung up and trudged back across the room. I picked up my pants and put them on; I put on my shirt and fumbled for the tie. I was worn out, but I kept on dressing, like a zombie clothing himself in a Karloff picture.

I swear I don't know how I got the heap out to Midland Walk, but suddenly there I was. I leaned on the button and had started to doze before she opened the door.

She choked, "Oh, thank you for coming, Mr. Keogh. Thank you!" She clasped my hand in both of hers and drew me into the room.

I mumbled, "Didn't mind at all.

What's the matter?"

With shaking hands she poured a tumbler of brandy and tried to drink it. I took it away from her before she spilled all of it down her housecoat. I held it for her and she took a deep swallow. I kept the rest of it.

"It's Warren," she sobbed. "Warren. He said he didn't want anything to do with that property, and he was right, Mr. Keogh. He . . . he . . ." She put her hands on the newel post and leaned her forehead on them. Her shoulders convulsed. Her sobs were hard, dry and binding, like a motor running without water.

"What was he right about?"

"That property of his uncle's."

"But what about it?"

She pushed herself away from the newel post. "I'm being silly," she said abruptly. "I'm being hysterical." She took the glass of brandy from me and took another swallow and handed the glass back to me. "I'll tell you what happened. Warren and I were lying in bed. He was asleep. I wasn't. The door opened and in came a gigantic figure. I was paralyzed. The figure came to the foot of the bed, held out its arm and fired six shots. I didn't realize he was holding a gun until the flame spurted. Warren groaned and sagged against me. The man turned and ran from the room. I don't know how long it was before I was able to move. It seemed hours. You can understand that, can't you, Mr. Keogh?"

"Sure," I said. "But why didn't you call the police? You shouldn't have called me. There's nothing I can do. You'd better call—"

"Warren," she said, "Warren said not to. He didn't want the police."

"And a doctor? Did you call a doctor?"

She didn't have to answer that one. The door gong tolled, and what she let

in was obviously a doctor.

"Upstairs, doctor," she said. "He's upstairs."

She sprang for the stairwell, the doctor behind her, and I behind him. On the second floor, the doctor tripped over a broom standing against the wall, but managed not to lose his midnight dignity. I put the broom back and went into the room after them.

WARREN CHAMBERS lay on his back on the bed. His pajama top was off and across his chest was an encarmined bath towel, sopping wet. The sheet on either side of him was gray with damp and speckled with dots of pink.

Mitchell was sitting on a chair beside the bed, his face a death's head in the shadows thrown by the small night light standing on the chest of drawers. He was wiping Warren's forehead with a wet wash cloth.

The doctor motioned him away and lifted the bath towel. His voice sounded shocked as he said, "My, my, my!"

Straight across Warren's chest was a row of small red dots, like gigantic mosquito bites, wiped clean for the moment by the wet towel. The blood started to ooze again. It was a wonder he was still alive. But he was. He heaved on the bed and his eyes rolled. His voice bubbled weakly in his mouth. "P'lice . . . no p'lice . . . no p'lice . . ."

The doctor's hands made vague, distressful motions. He muttered, "My, my, my!" again and bent over that perforated chest.

Mitchell stood at the foot of the bed. He said tightly, "Well, doctor?" The agony in his face looked no less acute than that suffered by Warren.

The doctor shook his head. "I'll do what I can. . . ." He stopped. In his league, that was a positive statement.

Mitchell understood. He nodded his

head briefly, twice, and marched stiff-legged out of the room.

Warren cried, "Adele. . . Adele!" He thrust his chest upward, as if it were bursting, then fell back heavily on the mattress.

The girl said, "Oh!" and her hands clenched and quivered at her sides. The doctor looked at her, shook his head and pulled the sheet up over the now calm face.

Mitchell was standing in the doorway. He looked at the bed, compressed his lips and turned and walked away. I heard him go down the stairs. Adele stared after him. Then, suddenly, as if comprehending something, she cried, "Father!" and darted out of the room. I looked at the doctor, then hurried out after her.

She was standing at the front door with her arms wound around Mitchell, and he was trying stiffly but firmly to push her away. She heard me coming and gave me a frantic glance over her shoulder.

"Stop him, Mr. Keogh!" she pleaded. "Don't let him go."

"Mr. Keogh has nothing to do with it," said Mitchell icily. "Now please take your arms away, Adele, or I'll be forced to push you away."

I walked over to them. "What's it all about?" I said.

He took her by the wrists, pushed down her arms and stepped backward away from her.

Adele said wildly, "He's got a gun. In his pocket. I felt it."

I looked at him. "What good is that going to do, Mr. Mitchell? You'll just get yourself in trouble. Let me have it. We'll call the police. They can handle it better than either of us." I held out my hand and walked toward him.

Mitchell said contemptuously, "All right. If you—"

HE LEAPED forward and caught me on the chest with both hands outstretched. I staggered back, tripped over the chair and crashed into the coffee table in front of the fireplace. Even as I was going down, I heard the front door slam. By the time I was up and out the door after him, his car was swinging into the street from the driveway.

I cursed and ran back into the house. I remembered the phone at the foot of the stairs and snatched it up and got a desk sergeant at headquarters I didn't recognize. He was probably one of the new ones after the shake-up. Taking a chance, I said, "Get Detectives Flavin and Kruger. The Bel Air Apartment, Parkview Avenue, the name is B. Raymond. Tell them for God's sake to step on it!"

Adele gave me a wild, frightened glance as I sprang by her out into the street. With any kind of luck the cops would get there before me, but I wanted to be there. I rode the throttle all the way and the Agency heap roared in wounded protest. It was getting a little too old for that kind of treatment. I got to the Bel Air before Flavin, but somewhere off in the quiet streets I could hear the banshee wail of the siren.

I hit the front door at a bound, and if it hadn't been open I think I would have gone through anyway. I went up the three flights of stairs as if they had been three rungs on a ladder. The door to Apartment 3-A hung open.

Through the arch to the living room I saw Brenda Raymond sitting stiffly on the sofa, her gun in her hand pointed to the floor. Beside her, stripped to the waist, wearing only his dungarees, stood Red. Both their faces were pointed slightly to the left of the door. They weren't moving.

I couldn't see Mitchell, but I could hear him. "Lift it, Miss Raymond. I'll

give you that much of a chance, which is more than your confederate gave my son-in-law tonight. Lift it."

She snapped, "You're nuts!"

Before I could jump into the room, his gun boomed and she started upright on the sofa, a sudden red flower blossoming in the center of her forehead. She fell straight forward.

Red started for the arch. He wasn't grinning. The .45 boomed again and his shoulders swung a little to one side and a slash of blood started across his ribs, but he kept coming. Nobody can do that after being hit with a slug from a .45. But he did it. I was in the arch and swung my sap at Mitchell's hand. It caught him on the forearm, just below the elbow, and the heavy gun fell from his fingers.

Red swerved toward me. "And Humpty-Dumpty too!" he said.

I WENT in to meet him. I avoided his hands and sapped him glancingly across the jaw, almost missing. He shook it off and turned to corner me between the sofa and the wall. My next swing caught his hand and I saw it dangle. I jumped back, just lucky that he moved so slowly. When he came in again I was ready for him. I jabbed with my left and as he instinctively raised his right arm, let him have the sap solidly this time at the side of the jaw. He faltered and I rapped it over his ear, almost gently, for he was on the way out. He pitched into the sofa, hit it with his shoulder and rolled off to the right, lying still when he hit the rug.

A cool voice drawled, "Artistic, Dinny, very artistic. But what the hell?"

Even that little bit of action had taken more out of me than I had realized. I'm getting too fat for this kind of shenanigans. I staggered over to the

mantel of the fireplace and hung on.

"Okay, Flavin," I said dully, "He's all yours."

"On your say-so, Dinny?"

"For murder. For the murder of Warren Chambers, and for the murder of Freddy Askian, for the murder of Lonny Buttman."

Flavin didn't believe me. He said, "That so?" and waited for me to go on. "A one-man army," he observed. He looked down at Red on the floor. "He looks big enough."

"Not him," I said. "Mitchell."

Flavin jerked. "Mitchell!" Kruger sneeped at me, but his eyes weren't in it. They shifted to Mitchell.

Mitchell looked at me briefly and said to Flavin, "He's absolutely mad. Why should I shoot my son-in-law?"

"For something worth a hundred thousand dollars or more," I said, "Something hidden away in a warehouse belonging to your son-in-law. When Red comes around, he'll have something to say about that, and maybe—"

Mitchell's eyes flared and as I started away from the mantel toward him, he stooped and scooped up the .45 with his left hand. It bayed and pieces of fireplace sprayed my right side. I dived for the floor and tried to roll behind the sofa. He paid no attention to Flavin or Kruger but hopped to one side and tried to get in another shot at me. He didn't look quite sane with his eyes distended, his mouth working loosely. Or maybe he was trying to commit suicide. They had their guns out before he had taken two steps and let him have it. He went down with five bullets in him, any one of which would have been fatal, so closely were they spaced.

His gun hung from his forefinger like a wilted daffodil and he went to his knees. He coughed and tried to bring

up his hand to his mouth, but it faded half way up. It fell against one thigh and he leaned forward until his forehead touched the rug. He toppled slowly over on his side and lay there, curled and comfortable, like a baby in a crib. The two detectives stood over him, their guns hanging, and looked at him with no pity in their eyes.

CHAPTER XII

I DIDN'T get to bed until seven the next morning. I had to sign more triplicates than there could have been originals, and talk to more people than should have been awake at that hour. Mitchell had been too politically important.

I gave them the story—and when I finished, it was funny but there were no parades forming to the right to pin badges on me. They all stood around and looked significantly at one another, and in the end they talked very fast and tried to make me feel very, very lucky indeed that they were letting me go home and go to bed without having to wear leg irons. I sneered at them, not very successfully, and said, who the hell are you kidding? But they dead-panned me out of the building into a squad car and inserted me into my apartment without even a pat on the back, and I was too tired to give a damn.

But I gave them the story.

I didn't want to tell them what a dope I had been, letting it run on as long as it did. Things like that you save to tell yourself when you're feeling low. But it had been Mitchell in the beginning, in the middle and in the end.

When he started making his political speeches for the Citizen's League, he probably hadn't any idea of the snowball he was starting at the top of the

mountain—until it caught up with him.

That was his son-in-law's inheritance, but the speeches were what started it.

Simmy Underwood, sniffing the political breeze, could smell what was coming and he ran to cover. He closed up shop. He wasn't running out; he was just suspending operations until after elections. He took all his gambling equipment—worth over a hundred thousand, as it turned out—and hid the lot of it in Uncle Stephen Goran's dilapidated warehouses.

You should have seen those warehouses when the cops broke into them. They were crammed to the roof with roulette layouts, slot machines, pin balls, and just about every other gambling device you can lay tongue to.

They also found Simmy Underwood in the basement—with a .38 slug in his head and a sub-machine gun cradled in his arms, and in front of him, huddled against the base of the wall, eight other corpses, riddled with machine gun bullets. They were the truck drivers and handlers who had moved his equipment into the warehouses for him. When it was all in, he shot them down to keep their mouths shut. Effective. Crude, but effective.

And when it was all over, there were only two left—Simmy and Lonny Buttman. The police checked the slug in Simmy and found it came from Buttman's gun. Buttman either thought Simmy was going to turn on him next, or he wanted the warehouseful to peddle for himself.

So, or anyway, Buttman tried to peddle his knowledge to Mitchell, who was making those anti-administration speeches at that time.

Maybe Mitchell was still honest up to this point. Maybe. I don't know. But let's say he was honest until he found out the gambling machines were

hidden in the warehouses owned by Stephen Goran, his son-in-law's uncle—Goran who has been knocked off already by Underwood to keep his mouth shut also.

Lonny Buttman was not very lucky. He didn't know what he was up against in Mitchell . . . until Mitchell blew off his head with that .45.

From then on, Mitchell was on the merry-go-round.

Too many people started getting interested in those warehouses. Shatakian and Freddy, Brenda Raymond and Red. And me.

RED talked. He didn't think he wanted to at first—but he talked. Brenda knew Simmy was dead when Lonny Buttman was knocked off by Mitchell, because Underwood had told her he was going to clean out the nest. She also knew that Lonny had gone to Mitchell to make a deal. But what she didn't know was where the machines had been hidden. She knew Goran had something to do with it, but Goran was dead. Then they found out that Freddy and Shatakian were handling Goran's estate, so they went out after Freddy—but it was not Red who had knocked Freddy off. Freddy was already dead when Red walked in—but Red did find those chuck-a-luck layouts, and Brenda Raymond put two and two together. Goran had warehouses, Freddy was working on Goran's estate, Freddy had the chuck-a-luck layouts.

I missed that one at the time, but she didn't.

That was the reason she upped her ante. I had thought she was cock-eyed and didn't know what she was talking about when she insisted that she was going to deal with Mitchell, not Ehrens. But she knew it. It was Keogh who was cock-eyed.

That was the reason she and Red

were on Mitchell's murder list.

Freddy was on for the same reason—he knew what was hidden in those warehouses. I as good as told Mitchell that when we left the Raymond apartment together the first time. He knew all about Simmy Underwood, he knew who Brenda Raymond was, he knew that Freddy had something to do with the deal when I told him I was doing a little job of heir-finding for Freddy.

But before he could kill Freddy, he had to have me find the real heir, his son-in-law, Warren Chambers. That part of it was easy. He had held Freddy at the point of a gun and made him tell me the address of Warren Chambers. That was the reason Freddy had talked so strangely over the phone. Hell, Freddy didn't even know who the real heir was until that moment.

Mitchell was the only one who knew. Chambers had disappeared ten years before, had changed his name—but he had told his wife of his past history, and she in turn had told Mitchell, who had pretended not to know a thing about it when I had gone to his home to find More, or Moore, or Chambers.

The moment I knew who the real heir was, Freddy was as good as dead—and Mitchell killed him with the bed. And that's not a guess. That's the way he did it.

The police found Mitchell's fingerprints on the footboard of the bed, and the autopsy showed that Freddy's neck had been crushed at the back—not twisted and broken, but crushed, so it's no miracle figuring it out. Mitchell dropped the bed on the back of Freddy's neck, fracturing his jaw in the bargain—after first knocking him unconscious with a blow on the temple. Then he dragged Freddy out and put him beside the bed.

He could have shot him, but he knew that I knew Red was after Freddy. Red

was a powerful man and could have delivered the blow, Mitchell figured, that had broken Freddy's neck. That's what I was supposed to think after Freddy's body was found.

BUT I think the worst blow Mitchell got, the most serious set-back, was when his son-in-law refused to take the property left to him by Uncle Stephen Goran. That would have left Mitchell out on the end of the limb, ruining the set-up he had so bloodily prepared. So he had to kill Warren. His daughter, Adele, was Warren's heiress, and she had already said she wanted Mitchell to administer the estate.

He had made a slip earlier in the evening when we were talking about the property. He had said something about the "buildings" Goran had owned and he had asked me the value of them. No one had said a word about "buildings." I had just called it "property" or the "estate." That's the kind of slip that doesn't mean a thing until you add up all the other slips.

Mitchell had known, also, that he was going to have to get rid of Brenda Raymond and Red. He had even brought a gun with him on his first visit, but I had been there and I had had a gun in my hand. He wasn't sure of me.

After we left there he gave me that malarkey about being afraid of Red and Brenda and pretended he was throwing the whole thing in Ehrens' lap—but he kept me in the deal. He wanted to see what kind of evidence Brenda was going to turn over to Ehrens, so he had me promise to bring it to him first, and also to promise that I'd keep my nose out of it.

He must have thought me a pretty thick Irishman. Hell, I was!

So he shot Warren with his small calibered gun, again rigging it so I

would think of Red as the killer. Adele had said a gigantic figure came in and shot her husband. She believed that even after the police proved by ballistics that the bullets in her husband's body had come from Mitchell's gun. She was very bitter about that, especially against me. If ever I want to lose my license, she's the girl I'll go to to do it. But hell, it's easy to make yourself appear tall. You can do it, for instance, by putting a coat over the end of a broom and holding it over your head.

The broom the doctor tripped over. It could be done that way. But that's something nobody's going to be able to prove. He could have done it some other way. But he did it. The only prints on the gun were his, and the bullets had come from that gun, and he stood to gain the most from the killing. It's just a guess, that broom part of it—but his prints were on the broom.

That's what made his sudden role of avenging angel, the man who was going to Uphold the Honor of the Family, such a phoney. It wasn't his kind of thing. He had been too practical and level-headed before that to turn so suddenly into an Avenger. He wasn't the avenger type.

In addition to that, he had a damned good reason for wanting Brenda and Red out of the way.

But he must have been counting on how beautiful it would have looked in print: **FATHER AVENGES SLAYING OF SON-IN-LAW!**

It would have been beautiful. He had gotten away with it once before when he killed Lonny Buttman. What was the headline that time? **ARMED GANGSTER KILLED BY MAYORALTY CANDIDATE!** And they had pinned medals on him for that one, so why shouldn't he try it again?

If he had been a stolid, cold-blooded

killer he could have gotten away with the whole thing. But if he had been stolid, he couldn't have thought it up in the first place. It was his fertile imagination that really tripped him. When I had faced him in Brenda Raymond's apartment with the fact that I knew what was hidden away in those warehouses belonging to his son-in-law, he cracked in so many places what was left of his sanity leaked out like rain through a straw hat.

No matter what happened, he was finished. He would never be able to cash in on those gambling machines. All I had to do was spill it to the two cops who were there, and it was all over—all his careful work gone for nothing.

I actually believe he did go insane in that moment. Imagine the strain the man must have been under! He wasn't a hardened, professional killer, but in less than a month he had killed Lonny Buttman, Freddy, Warren Chambers, Brenda Raymond, and had just missed killing Red. He couldn't have been sane.

So, when I said that, he cracked—and there was only one thought left in his head, the one thought that had been driving him on and on through the other killings—I knew what was in those warehouses and I had to die. Why else would he deliberately turn his back on two detectives he must have known were armed? He just plain went crazy.

Or had he been all along?

CHAPTER XIII

I DIDN'T wake up until after five that afternoon, and I wouldn't have even then if a pair of clowns hadn't

been trying to batter my door down with their bare hands.

Clowns. Flavin and Kruger. Flavin had a bulky-looking rolled up newspaper under his arm. He looked as friendly as only a cop can when he's about to ask a favor. Kruger was doing his best, but he looked as if someone had brought him in at the point of a gun.

Flavin said, "Hi, Dinny. How're you feeling, boy?" And Kruger said, "Hi."

I brought them in and said, "Sit down, boys."

They sat on the studio couch and Flavin gravely unwrapped his newspaper and brought out a bottle of Old Bushmill's best Irish.

"With the compliments of the Chief," he said handing it to me.

"What does he want in return?" I asked, "My right eye? He could use it." I set the bottle on the coffee table. "Well, what does he want?"

Flavin coughed. "It's this way, Dinny," he said casually. "The Chief figures we have enough for the newspapers without dragging in that warehouse and them machines, you know? And it wouldn't do the Department too much good if words were spoken and it got around . . . Know what I mean?"

I said, "Sure, I know just what you mean. Only too glad to do it for you, Joe. But there's a little favor I wanted to ask of you boys first."

"Anything, Dinny. Anything you say."

I gave each of them a fork and set that box of cigars between them on the coffee table. "Now, damn you," I said grimly, "eat them up!"

THE END

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HEAVEN RAN LAST



By
WILLIAM P. McGIVERN



(Continued from page 67)

half-wit.

"How about a guess," Harrigan said. "Was it after nine o'clock?"

She frowned and looked down at the floor. Harrigan was squinting at her through the smoke of his cigarette. I took a long slow breath and the room was very quiet.

Suddenly her face cleared and she looked at him with a relieved smile. "Wait a minute. I remember now. We had an argument about the time when he got back. I guess I was mad because he'd been gone so long. He called the switchboard and asked the girl the time. She said it was eight-thirty."

"You heard her say that?"

"Yes."

"I thought Johnny made the call."

"He did, but he held the phone over so I could hear it, too."

"I see," Harrigan said. He was quiet a little while, looking at his drink, and then he sighed and pushed the hair back from his forehead. "That clears up a couple of angles." He smiled at her. "That's all I wanted to know, Marie. Thanks."

She looked at me. "I got to get back to work, Johnny."

I went to the door with her. "Thanks, honey. I'll pick you up tonight about eight o'clock. I'll explain all this to you then."

"Okay, Johnny."

She went out and I got busy fixing two more drinks. I felt fine. The tightness was gone.

Harrigan said, "What were you so excited about bringing her up here for, Johnny?"

I grinned. "Didn't you notice that

rock she was wearing?"

"Oh. That way, eh? She seems like a nice kid. Congratulations."

"Thanks. She is a nice kid. I didn't want her to think I was mixed up with the cops. And I didn't like the idea of anybody knowing she was up here in my room at night."

He grinned. "You have changed. But I still can't see you as the pipe smoking husband. How long have you been engaged?"

"I got her the ring just a few days ago. But I've known her for a long time."

He finished his drink in one long swallow and got to his feet. "Well, I hope it works out all right." He went to the door, then turned back. "Johnny, you knew Olsen's wife and you knew Lesser. She insists they were just friends. What do you think?"

I shrugged. "How would I know. They were grown people, just like you see walking around the streets every day. He was up in her apartment. They were having a couple of drinks. Do you think they were getting ready to play rummy?"

"I guess not. Well, take it easy, Johnny."

He waved at me and went out the door.

CHAPTER XI

AFTER he left I went down to the bar in the lobby and had a drink or two. The alibi had worked swell. Marie was set now to clear me if anything broke.

I felt pretty good, but I couldn't get

my mind off wanting Alice. I didn't know what she was going through and I wanted to be with her. But that was out. There were other things on my mind, too. Harrigan, for one. I hadn't liked the way he had figured Frank was innocent. That was too sharp and too close.

There was some work I should have been doing but every time I tried to work my mind started twisting around, figuring angles and imagining things that could go wrong. I had to get some cash soon. I hadn't sent Marshall his check and that would be another thousand dollars. That would just about clean me. On top of that there was a hotel bill of almost three hundred, the garage bill and a lot of other expenses.

All of that had to be taken care of but when I got thinking about doing it, a lot of other things crowded into my mind and all I could think of was getting a drink.

I must have been sitting there about an hour when Banghart came in and sat down beside me. He smiled and said hello in his quiet voice, and ordered himself a Tom Collins. Banghart was a medium-sized guy, about forty-five, with neat grey hair, good clothes and a face that had the sharp strong look of a steel trap.

He was a big wheel in town, one of those half-honest guys who own breweries, trucking companies and things like that. He wasn't in the rackets, but he wasn't far out.

We talked for a little while about things and then he asked me how the horses were going.

"Plenty of suckers around," I said.

He smiled. "I'd like to join the list. There's a horse tomorrow at Hialeah that I want to get on. It's Adelaide, in the sixth race, I believe."

"I didn't know you played the horses."

"I don't, as a rule, but this is sentiment. Adelaide is my wife's name, so maybe I'll be lucky."

"I thought you were divorced," I said.

"I am," he said. He smiled and took out his wallet. "I was lucky enough to get rid of her, so maybe I'll be lucky on the horse." He counted out ten one-hundred-dollar bills from a roll that would never miss them and laid them on the bar. "Put that on the nose," he said.

"Okay." I put the money away and listed the bet in a book I carry for that purpose. "Hope you're lucky," I said. "Thanks. Another drink?"

We had a couple more and then some guys came in and I guess Banghart was meeting them because he said good-bye to me and joined them at their table.

I went back to my room. The first thing I did was check on Adelaide. She was about a ten to one bet usually and she hadn't won any races as a three year old. It looked like a sucker bet. But Banghart wasn't that kind of a guy.

There was a chance the fix might be in, which is what makes it tough for bookies. They go along taking honest bets, but then a couple of owners get together and set up a race and the books get clipped, not only by the smart money, but by a lot of dumb money that's just lucky enough to be on the right horse.

I made a few calls to guys who usually know what's going on but nobody knew anything about Adelaide. Maybe everything was all right and Banghart was just making a hunch bet. Maybe.

I COULDN'T afford to hold the bet, because if Adelaide came in at ten to one I'd be on a spot. I knew I should call the syndicate wire right then and lay off the whole damn bet.

I even got as far as the phone. I

picked it up and then I stuck my hand in my pocket and felt those crisp hundred-dollar bills.

I put the phone back down slowly. What I was thinking about was dangerous. I was thinking about hanging onto this bet and taking a chance that Adelaide would run out.

I needed the dough bad. And right then I knew I was going to take a chance. There wasn't anything else I could do. I was caught in a squeeze.

The first thing I did was write a check for five hundred dollars payable to Marshall and I wrote a note telling him I'd send the other five hundred over in a few days. I addressed an envelope to him and stuck on a special delivery stamp. When I dropped the letter in the mail chute beside the elevators I felt better. After Marshall cashed the check I'd have seven hundred left in the bank, and I had ten hundred dollar bills in my pocket. That wasn't a lot of money but it was something to work on.

I tried to push everything else out of my head then and I worked straight through the afternoon. About five-thirty I quit and took a shower. The date with the blonde was for eight o'clock and that would give me time to have dinner and a few long drinks.

I was liking the idea of the date with the blonde. She was easy to impress, and I got a kick out of taking her places where they knew me and playing the big shot. I'd never been able to do that with Alice. We couldn't go any place we might be seen and recognized, and those kind of things never impressed her much anyway.

We'd had to stay in little joints out on the West Side or take a week-end trip to Michigan or Wisconsin. That didn't make much difference though. The blonde was nice but I didn't need her the way I needed Alice, and that was the real difference.

I was tying my tie when the phone rang. I froze there in front of the mirror and then I swore out loud. My nerves were shot to pieces. Every time the phone rang or there was a knock on the door I started winding up inside.

I picked up the phone. It was Alice.

"I've got to see you," she said.

"That's out, baby. You know why," I said.

"I've got to see you tonight." Her voice was flat and tight.

I didn't know what had happened but the way her voice sounded made me suddenly afraid.

"Where are you now?" I said.

"At the apartment. Johnny, get out here. Do you understand?" Her voice rose suddenly.

"Take it easy. I'll be out, baby." I looked at my watch. "It's six now. Take a walk over to Sheridan Road and walk north on the east side of the street. I'll be along and pick you up in about twenty minutes. Got that?"

"I've got it," she said and hung up.

I put the phone down and I could feel myself shaking. What in hell could have happened? I started for the door and then I remembered the blonde. I had to call her and break the date for tonight and I knew that might start another explosion.

But her old man answered the phone. Marie wasn't home yet so I told him to tell her I couldn't make it tonight and that I'd call her later.

I took the elevator down to the garage, got into my car and headed out north. When I passed the Edgewater Beach I started watching for Alice. I spotted her about a block past Thornedale. She had on a white dress and was walking slowly.

I PULLED up to the curb and opened the door. She walked quickly to the car, got in and slammed the door. I let

the clutch out and got away fast.

It hadn't taken five seconds. I looked in the rear vision mirror and the nearest car was a couple of blocks back. I went straight out north on Sheridan, through Wilmette and Glencoe and pretty soon we were out in the country, with nothing but a lot of trees and beaches around.

I swung off on a graveled road that wound through some trees and stopped at the edge of a slope that rolled down to a wide beach, from where you could see miles and miles of the smooth green lake. When I cut the motor the silence came down on us, thick and heavy. There were just a few noises, the whispering noise of bugs as they went past, and the sound of the water about a hundred yards away, but that just seemed to make it quieter.

There were a few stars out now and the edge of a new moon showing over the lake. Everything was peaceful and quiet, but between us there was something ready to explode.

I said, "Well, what's it all about?"

"Harrigan was out to see me this afternoon." She said it like it meant everything.

"So?"

She turned a little and looked at me. Her face was in the shadow and I couldn't see her expression, but her voice was flat and hard. "He came to see me after he left you. He told me about the girl that came up to your room. The one wearing the big shiny engagement ring. That's what this is all about, Johnny."

"What else did he say?"

That stopped her a little. She waited a second or so and I could hear her breathing unevenly. "That's enough for a start, isn't it?"

"Goddam," I said. "Is that why you had to see me?"

"That isn't all. He said you told him

I had been intimate with Lesser."

"What if I did?"

She drew away as if she'd been struck. "You did, then. Have you been reading the papers, Johnny? Do you know what I'm being called by every paper in town? Do you think it's enjoyable being treated by the people in the building as if I had leprosy?"

Her voice was unsteady and she was almost crying.

I grabbed both her arms and pulled her close to me. "Listen, you silly little fool. What those people think and say about you doesn't mean a damn thing. All we've got to worry about is getting away with this deal. Nothing else matters."

"That's all right for you," she said. She struggled wildly against me for a minute but I gripped her arms hard and held her tight against me and then she began to cry and it came from deep inside her and went through me like a knife.

"You can say nothing matters," she said hoarsely. "You've got that little blonde waitress to play around with, and nobody is treating you as if you were something filthy."

I put my arms around her then and the fear I felt was the worst I'd ever know. While she was talking I knew we were doing the one thing that would tear everything apart. Once we started fighting and doubting each other we were through. We were stuck together by a murder and when you tear away from something like that it rips everything along with it.

The fear that made me feel sick was there because Harrigan was starting to tear us apart.

MAYBE he didn't know what he was doing, but if he ripped us open, he'd know everything. He was working now on the wrong end of the angle,

figuring someone had tried to get rid of Lesser, but when that fell through he'd start wondering if someone wasn't trying to get rid of Frank. And that might start him after us and unless we stuck together like glue he'd have us cold.

"Listen to me, baby," I whispered. I was talking into her hair and my voice was low and muffled. I pulled her closer to me and ran my hands over her bare arms and after a while she stopped crying, except for a little sob every now and then, and finally she was quiet in my arms.

"Baby, baby," I said. "The blonde is just a cover-up to keep anybody from getting any ideas that you and I might be hooked together. They won't think a guy planning to get married has any other ideas. The ring was just part of the plan. About you playing house with Lesser, well that doesn't mean anything. Harrigan asked me what I thought and I just made a normal crack. I couldn't say you hadn't because he might wonder how I knew. Every angle is touchy now, baby. After Frank goes up for his stretch, things will settle down and we can get away."

While I talked to her I kept kissing her occasionally, soft little kisses that didn't mean anything, but she quieted down in my arms, and by the time I finished she was curled up next to me and the meanness was gone from her face and her lips were curved in a sad little smile.

We sat there for a long time, watching the stars come out and feeling the cool fresh wind off the lake. Finally it got dark and colder but we stayed there, huddled close together and not talking at all.

We seemed a million miles from everybody in the world. It was peaceful and quiet and it was easy to believe right then there wasn't going to be any more trouble. But that was just

a dream. We both knew we'd have to leave pretty soon and drive back into our regular lives where there was worry waiting for us.

"Let's go and lie on the beach, Johnny."

"You'll get sand in your shoes, baby."

"I don't care."

A long while later we drove back to Chicago. I dropped her at Sheridan and Granville. She held my hand tight for a minute before walking quickly away.

I went on downtown. When I got to my room I saw three telephone messages under the door. They were all from the blonde. She had called at eight-thirty, at ten and at eleven.

There wasn't anything to do about them now so I tore them up and went to bed.

CHAPTER XII

THE phone woke me the next morning. It was the blonde.

She said, "This is Marie. I'm downstairs. Can I come up and see you?"

"Sure thing. But give me a couple of minutes to get dressed, honey."

"All right." She hung up and I climbed out of bed and dressed in a hurry. I hadn't liked the way her voice sounded. She didn't sound hurt or mad, which was what I expected. She sounded cool and sure of herself.

She knocked while I was putting on my coat. I opened the door and she came in with a funny little smile on her face.

"I'm sorry, honey, about last night," I said. I took her by the shoulders and tried to kiss her but she twisted away from me and sat down in the big chair.

I noticed then she wasn't dressed for work. She had on a black silk dress with sheer stockings and high-heeled shoes. They made her look more sure

of herself and older.

"I waited up pretty late last night," she said.

"I told you I was sorry," I said. "A deal came up that I just had to handle."

"That's all right," she said.

"Fine. How about a drink?"

She said no, so I made one for myself. I realized I'd been hitting the stuff pretty hard during the last week and I decided to have one stiff one and lay off for the rest of the day.

"You're not mad then?" I said.

"I was, but I'm not any more." She was looking at me steadily, with the same funny little smile on her face. "I quit my job this morning," she said.

She said it like it meant something.

"I knew you wouldn't want your wife working as a waitress," she said.

There was only one thing to say. "Of course I don't," I said.

"I quit because I figured we'd be getting married pretty soon," she said.

"As soon as we can," I said. I drank a little from my glass.

"How soon do you think that will be?" she said.

"That's hard to say. I'm tied up right now in a couple of deals that mean big money. I've got to get those set before we can do anything."

"I'd like to get married right away," she said, and she smiled at me like she hadn't heard a word I'd said. "You know that's all I ever really wanted. A place of my own, a husband, maybe some kids. I'm not a very smart girl. I didn't even finish high school. I don't read anything but the newspapers and all I read them for is the funnies and the society page. That's funny, isn't it? I mean about the society page. I like to look at those girls wearing nice clothes and walking around country clubs, but I wouldn't want that. I wouldn't know how to act in places like that. But I'll

know how to act in a place of my own. That's what I want and I want it right away, Johnny."

I was nervous and I didn't know why.

"Well," I said, "getting married right away is out. I just told you that."

"I know you did, Johnny, but I've been thinking the last couple of days. I was thinking about how funny it was the way you started taking me around. Night after night to the best places in town, spending a lot of money and finally asking me to marry you and buying me a big expensive ring."

"What's funny about it?"

She went on as though she hadn't heard me. "Then after we'd been going around for about a week you asked me to come up here and talk to a detective. He wanted to know where you were Sunday night. When I told him I was here with you at eight-thirty you looked pretty relieved."

MY GLASS was empty and I filled it again. I took my time about it so I could think. But I wasn't thinking very well. I didn't know what she was getting at, but it was bringing back the tight, wound-up feeling that had been building all during the past week.

I sat down and drank a little and tried to match her steady even look. She still had the funny little smile on her face.

"That's why I thought we'd better get married right away," she said.

"What are you trying to get at?" I said. "Do you think I started taking you around just so I could prove an alibi for Sunday night. Is that what you think?"

"No, I was thinking about something else, Johnny. Sunday night I guess I got pretty tight. When you left me I was asleep, but I woke up before you got back. It seemed like you'd been gone a long time so I called the operator

and asked her what time it was. She said it was a quarter of nine."

I heard the words all right but they didn't come to me like words. They were like a piece of cold iron driving up through my stomach. I raised my glass and drank a little but I don't know whether I tasted the whiskey. All I know was the tight ache inside me and the funny little smile on her face.

She said, "When you came back and we argued about the time I thought I might be wrong. I went into the bathroom to splash some water on my face. You told me to, remember? Just as I was coming out the phone rang. You pulled me down beside you on the bed and asked the operator what time it was. When I got thinking about all this I thought that was funny. When you answer a phone you say hello, or something like that. If you want to know the time in a hotel you call the operator. She doesn't call you. How would she know you wanted to know the time?"

"Anyway she said it was eight-thirty. You held the phone over against my ear and asked her to say it again. And she did. But it wasn't eight-thirty then. I know it wasn't, because I'd called her before and she said it was a quarter of nine."

"What's the rest of it?" I said.

"That's all. You didn't get here until about nine o'clock. But you wanted me to say you were here at eight-thirty. And that's what I said." She looked at me evenly for a while and then she said in a low voice, "That's why I think we ought to get married right away."

I didn't say anything. I finished my drink and made another. I was a little drunk already, and I wanted to get drunker. I wanted to do anything that would kill the fear that was making me shake all over. Then I put the glass down on a table and went back and sat down. I had to fix this but drinking

wouldn't do it.

"Why do you want to marry me at all?" I said. "You know I'm in trouble. And if you think the things you do about me you can't love me very much. Why not run to the cops right now?"

"If I'm married to you they can't make me talk against you can they? I read that somewhere. Isn't that right, Johnny?"

That stopped me cold. I looked at her and saw that she meant it. The wise little smile was gone from her face. She looked scared now. Her mouth was open a little and her eyes were big and staring.

"I do love you, Johnny," she whispered.

I went over to her and knelt beside the chair and took her in my arms. She buried her face in my chest.

"I had to tell you that or you wouldn't let me help you, Johnny," she said.

"I'm glad you did, honey," I said.

While I held her she started to cry. I patted her shoulders and all the time my mind was racing.

Maybe she loved me. Maybe she was on the level about that but when I gave her the final brush she'd blow wide open and start talking. And Harrigan, for one, would listen to her with a lot of interest.

I HAD to shut her mouth. Marrying her would do it, but that would tear Alice wide open and if that happened everything would tear with her.

It was funny how quick I thought of murder. Once you get out of a mess by murdering, it must change the way you think. It's so sure and final that it's the first thing to come into your mind when you're in trouble.

Lesser was my first. When he was there on the floor, groaning and rolling his head, I had a problem. But when

I got the gun and put two shots in his head the problem was over, and Lesser wasn't anything at all.

Now I knew it had to be the same way with the blonde. Only there wasn't time for any plans. This would have to be cold and sure and quick.

"Don't cry, honey," I said. "You were right to tell me all that. Now just keep it quiet until we're married. I'm in a jam but it's nothing serious. Tonight we'll take a nice long drive and everything will look a lot better."

"When I'm with you everything seems all right," she said. She looked up at me and smiled. "I feel it's going to be right."

"Sure it will, honey."

After a little while she went into the bathroom to put on some make-up, then I kissed her and took her to the door.

When she was gone I looked at the drink I'd made and then I went into the bathroom with it and poured it down the toilet. I was shaky enough without knocking myself out with more liquor. I had to be sharp now.

I grabbed my hat and went down to get some food. It was almost two-thirty then and I sat in the restaurant, drinking tomato juice and thinking of how I was going to get rid of the blonde.

I had work to do that afternoon but there was too much on my mind now. When I'd think about the work my thoughts would twist around and pretty soon I'd be thinking about the blonde. That was the big thing now.

About three I went across the street to a little bar that made a practise of picking up race results on the radio every day. I had a beer and sat around talking to some guys I met there. The beer tasted good. Cold and sharp and it made me feel a lot better than the whiskey I'd been drinking.

The guy next to me was talking the seventh race at Hialeah. He'd been on

the winner for a few bucks and now he was moaning because he hadn't shot the whole roll.

I'd forgotten about Banghart's bet. Now I remembered it and the thought made me cold. I took a long swallow from my beer . . .

"Who took the sixth?"

"Some dog, name of Adelaide."

"What did she pay?"

"Nine to one. First race she won as a three-year-old. Can you beat that?" He went on talking about something else, but I wasn't listening.

I pushed the bottle of beer away from me and told the bartender to give me a shot of whiskey.

"What's the matter?" he said. "You look bad."

I drank the shot and tried to keep my hands steady. I felt numb all over. The noises in the bar seemed to be coming from miles away.

Adelaide at nine to one.

I felt people were looking at me. I got up and walked out and went up to my room. All the way I was looking over my shoulder and even while I was doing it, I knew I was being silly.

I hated the look of the room. I hated the smell. I hated the gloomy shadows that settled down when the sun moved to the other side of the building. But there wasn't any other place I could go.

I locked the door and pulled down the shades. I sat on the edge of the bed and I was dripping with sweat. Nine thousand bucks. A guy with a face like a steel trap would be asking me for nine thousand bucks pretty soon.

I SNAPPED on a light and started walking around the room, pounding my hands together. After a while I calmed down enough to go through my accounts, trying to find some guys that owed me money. There were a few. A fin here, a sawbuck there, adding up to

about forty bucks. Forty buck and I needed a mint full.

There was a chance of borrowing the dough. I called nine guys in a half hour, guys I knew pretty well. I couldn't come out and ask for the money like I needed it bad, because that kind of news gets around town fast. I had to hint around but they guessed what I wanted and they did just what I'd have done. They came up with long hard luck stories.

About seven o'clock I took a shower and got dressed. I had to pick up the blonde at eight and I made myself think about her. I thought about what I had to do with her and that kind of thinking didn't help the way I was feeling.

I was tight and nervous inside, but I'd been that way for so long now it seemed natural. I made myself one last big drink and sat down with it, trying to cool and relax.

I wished I could crawl into some cave where it was dark and quiet, a little cave that nobody else knew anything about, where I could hide forever.

The phone rang then and I got tighter inside. Sounds were hurting me now. They hit my ears like hot needles or pushed into my stomach like cold steel. They weren't telephone bells and automobile horns and street noises any more. They were things that jabbed at me, hurt me, made me jump.

I picked up the phone. It was Banghart.

He said, "Well, Johnny, I guess I took you." He laughed.

"You sure did," I said.

His voice was quiet, soft and natural. "One of those things, I guess," he said. "That was just a hunch bet and look what happened. Paid nine to one, didn't she?"

"Yeah."

"I thought you might drop in this afternoon," he said.

"Sure, but I was busy."

"It doesn't matter. When will I see you, Johnny?"

There was no use lying. I said, "Banghart I'm caught short. I didn't lay off your bet. I held it. I can't pay you right away."

He was quite for a long time and all I could hear was my heart punching at my ribs. "Do you hear me?" I said. "I got caught. I haven't got the dough. You'll have to give me a little time."

He said, "I'm not worrying about the money. Relax, Johnny. We all make mistakes at times. How much time will you need?"

"Nine thousand bucks is a lot of money. You'll get every penny of it, Banghart, but I'll need a couple weeks."

"This is Wednesday, isn't it? Supposing we say next Sunday?"

"Christ, Banghart, be reasonable." My voice sounded like I was choking, I guess, but it was because of the way I was wound up inside. "I'll get your money for you but I can't pull it out of a hat."

"Johnny," he said, and his voice was still quiet and soft. "I don't think I'm being unreasonable. We made a bet. You lost. I naturally want my money. But if you're short, that's all right. I'm giving you four days to raise the money. I think that's enough time."

"I don't know if I can do it," I said.

"I'd advise you to try like the devil, Johnny." His voice wasn't soft any more. It had the sharp sound a trap makes when it springs shut. "I'll expect to hear from you Sunday night. Call me at my Loop office. If I'm not there someone can tell you where to reach me." He hung up.

I PUT the phone down. Four days. It wasn't much, but it was better than nothing. I knew guys in town who wouldn't have given me ten minutes.

Something might break. I finished my drink and tried not to think I was kidding myself. I went down and got my car then and went out to the blonde's. She was ready when I got there. I talked to the old man about how hot it was down in the yards, then Marie and I went out to the car.

When we went down the street the women on the porches stopped talking and looked at the car. I drove out north and she sat beside me, not saying anything, just smiling and looking happy.

She looked pretty good. She had on a light blue dress and a bow in her hair. She had her hair let down to her shoulders and it looked clean and bright blowing in the wind and left her face looking round and kind of soft.

She put her hand on my arm and looked at me and smiled.

"Don't look that way, Johnny."

"How do I look?"

"You look like your muscles are all bunched tight."

"Let's don't worry about how I look."

"All right, Johnny." She took her hand away from my arm carefully, as if she was afraid I'd notice that it had been there.

"I've got troubles," I said, "but they don't have to bother you."

"They do, Johnny. Is it what we talked about this afternoon?"

"That's part of it."

"Well, that'll be over when we get married. They can't make me say anything then, can they?"

"No," I said shortly.

She had one idea in her mind now. She had me caught where she thought I couldn't move. Maybe she thought she was doing all this because she loved me, but my guess was she figured she had me caught tight. She'd never let go now. The only mistake she made was

telling me everything she knew.

When I got out past the city I pulled in at one of the dark beaches. It wasn't far from where Alice and I stopped the night before.

We sat for a while in the car and then I said, "Let's take a walk down to the water."

"The sand is wet, isn't it?"

"It's all right here. Let's go."

We got out of the car and went down on the beach. There was a moon coming up across the lake, but there was a mist in the air that made the light weak and cloudy. This was a deserted section of the beach and the only noise was the faint lap of the water.

I didn't know what I had in mind. We were close together and when her heels would twist in the sand she'd giggle and grab hold of my arm. When we got down to the water she shivered and moved closer to me.

"I hate water at night," she said.

The lake looked black and restless. Light from the moon made a faint yellow path across it, and here and there you could see the flick of a whitecap. There was a light breeze coming up and the air was getting cooler. We were the only ones within miles of the place.

"Can you swim?" I said.

She shivered again and laughed nervously. "I guess I've always been too afraid. When I was a kid we used to go down to the beach a lot in the summer, but I never learned. I don't know why but water has always scared me. Just thinking about it on a night like this gives me goose pimples all over. It looks so black and deep."

I LAUGHED. "I didn't know you had such nutty ideas. The water won't hurt you."

"I know . . . but I'm still scared."

"Let's go wading now."

"Now? It's too cold, Johnny." She

backed away a little and said, "You go on in and I'll watch."

"Don't be like that, honey." I put my arms around her and pulled her close to me. "You wouldn't be afraid if I was with you."

"Maybe not, but—"

"Don't be like that. I'll put my coat on the ground and you can put your clothes on top of it. That'll keep the sand out."

She looked out at the water and shivered again. "All right, if you want me to. But I won't go far."

We took off our clothes and made a pile of them on top of my coat. I still didn't know what I had in my mind, but it was there, like something dark and soft, on the edge of my thinking.

I went in first. The water was cold but I went out until it was up to my shoulders. I heard her squeal when she put one foot in the water, but she kept coming out until she was just a foot or so from me.

The water was up to her throat there and I could hear her teeth chattering. Her face looked small and white against the black water.

"I'm standing on my toes now," she said. "I can't go any farther."

"You're okay. I'm right here."

"Aren't you cold?"

"No, I feel fine."

I put my hands under her elbows and lifted her off the bottom, until the water was down below her shoulders.

"That better?" I said.

"Yes, but I'm so cold."

I backed out slowly, step by step, until the water was almost up to my chin. Now it was over her head.

"Johnny, don't. This is too deep. Take me back in." Her voice was thin and scared.

I didn't know whether this was it or not. I was thinking fast. I could say we were swimming and she got a cramp,

and when I pulled her out it was too late. Nobody could say anything else.

I backed up a little more. All I had to do was let her go and she'd drown. She was only six feet from shallow water, but she'd lose her head and start fighting wildly, and then she'd get a mouthful of water and it would all be over.

She pulled herself close to me and wrapped her arms around my neck. "Johnny, I'm scared," she whimpered. "Why don't you take me in? Please, please, Johnny!"

"You're all right, honey. Just let go my neck and I'll tow you back in."

"No, Johnny, no." She was scared now, bad, and it made her frantic. Her thin little arms were tightening around my neck and I was having trouble breathing.

I knew this was the time.

I put my hands on her shoulders and shoved down hard. Her head went under the water and I felt her legs starting to kick wildly. I knew that in a minute she'd go crazy and start beating the water with her hands. When that happened all I had to do was let her go and the water would take care of everything else. I felt the thin bones in her shoulders twisting and then her arms slipped from my neck and she began clawing at the water with her fingers.

It was just at that second I heard the automobile. I shot a look back at the beach and I saw the headlights of a car coming along the road. The lights bounced up and down as the car hit the ruts in the road, then swept over the beach and out over the water.

THE light hit me in the eyes, blinding me for a second. I heard the motor cut and then a voice yelled, "How's the water?" and I knew whoever was in the car had seen me.

She was still fighting the water. I pulled her up fast and got my arms around her body. When the guys in the car saw her head next to mine they snapped off the lights and we were left alone in the dark water.

She was choking and crying. Her arms were around my neck and her fingernails were digging into my shoulders.

"Take me in, Johnny," she said, but she was crying and choking so much the words were just gasping noises.

I moved into shallow water with her and I felt weak and scared.

"Just take it easy, honey. You're all right now," I said.

"Why did you do it, Johnny?" she said, with a kind of gasping sob.

"I got a cramp. It doubled me up for a second and I pulled you under with me. That's all it was, honey."

I didn't know whether she believed me or not but it was all I could think to say. After she was able to stand we went up on the beach. We dried ourselves with my shirt and got back into our clothes. The other car had pulled away by the time we were dressed. We went back to my car and got in and I gave her a cigarette.

From the light of the match I could see the white circle of her face. Her lips were blue and every now and then she'd shudder a little.

"Would you like to go somewhere and get a hot drink?" I said.

"I—I'd like to go home, Johnny."

I drove slowly to her home. My mind was twisting a lot of ideas around. I didn't know whether she knew I'd tried to kill her. If she did I couldn't leave her now.

When we pulled up to her place the houses on the street were dark. I cut the motor and then I put my arm around her shoulder and pulled her closer to me. Her body felt tense but

when I tilted her chin up she let me kiss her a couple of times on her lips.

"Mad at me?"

"No, it's just that I was so scared out there, Johnny. Then when you told me you had a cramp, I got to thinking of how it would be if anything happened to you."

"Would that bother you?"

She turned her face up to me and kissed me hard on the mouth. I didn't know what she was thinking, but I decided to take the chance. Everything inside me felt so tight and scared that I knew I would have trouble trying anything else that night.

We stayed out in the car for about half an hour and then I took her up to the porch. I made a date with her for the next night and kissed her a few more times and went back to the car.

When I turned left on Belmont I noticed that a blue Nash was following me. When I got over to the drive it was still there.

I gave the car to the doorman at the hotel to put away for me. As I started toward the lobby, I saw the blue Nash pull past and head north on Madison.

There were two guys in the front seat and they were looking straight ahead.

CHAPTER XIII

THE next morning Harrigan called me and asked me to come down to the Criminal Courts building. When I got there I found him in an office on the second floor, talking with an assistant State's Attorney, Morowitz.

Harrigan introduced us and then said, "This is just for the record, Johnny. We want to get your statement on what happened Sunday night." He punched a buzzer on his desk and pretty soon a court reporter came in, carrying a notebook.

I sat down and lit a cigarette. Harri-

gan put his feet on the desk and looked at his hands. His face was tired and lined and he needed a shave, but his eyes still had that quick bright look. Morowitz sat down, too, and just looked at me without any expression at all on his face.

The office was hot and close. There were butts on the floor and there was a rip in the window shade that let a bar of dusty sunlight fall across the floor.

"Any time you're ready," Harrigan said.

The court reporter had his book open and a pencil ready, so I went through the story. I almost had it memorized by this time. I had the funny feeling I'd never talked about anything else in my life.

When I got through Harrigan looked over at Morowitz. "Got any questions?"

Morowitz shrugged. He was a short stocky guy with black hair and sharp eyes. "It all seems pretty clear." He looked at me then and said, "When did you say you talked to Lesser, Ford?"

"About him going up to her place Sunday night? That was Friday afternoon."

"About what time?"

"Pretty early, I guess. We were having lunch."

"I see. And what time did you leave Olsen that night?"

"Around eight-twenty."

"We're sure of that," Harrigan said. "He was in his hotel room at eight-thirty. I talked to the person who was with him at that time."

The court reporter was still taking everything down and I had a feeling of relief. One thing had bothered me about getting rid of the blonde. That was because she was my cover-up on that time angle. But now it was in an official record, in Harrigan's words. That would be just as good a witness as

the blonde.

There weren't any more questions for Morowitz and we talked about nothing in particular for a while. I asked them how the case against Frank was going and Harrigan shrugged his shoulders.

"He claims he didn't do it. The State's Attorney says he did. It'll be up to a jury."

"Have you got a decent case against him?" I said.

Morowitz said, "We've got a decent circumstantial case. We can establish the fact that he had been quarreling with his wife for a week before the murder. We can prove he knew his wife was seeing Lesser that night. And we can place him, by his own admission, in the apartment at eight-thirty, which was the time the neighbors heard the shots fired. It all adds up."

I left after a little more talk. I had the feeling everything was all right on that angle. They had a good case and they were going to send him away.

That much was all right but I had other things on my mind. When I left the courts building and started downtown the blue Nash picked me up and followed me into the Loop. I stopped at a little dice joint on Jackson Boulevard and the blue Nash went past and I saw two men in the front seat. I knew by this time they were Banghart's way of protecting his nine thousand dollars. My chances of taking any sudden trip out of Chicago were pretty slim.

I went into the dice joint and that's where I learned the news had spread. A card game broke up when I came in and a couple of guys I knew pretty well said hello kind of nervously and then left in a hurry. The word was around town that I'd gone short on a big bet and a guy in that spot isn't too healthy to have around.

I BOUGHT a pack of cigarettes and got out of there. I went back to my room and there weren't any calls and there weren't any bets and I knew that everyone was laying off me until I got myself back in the clear.

There wasn't any use hanging around waiting for the phone to ring so I went out to a show and killed the afternoon. The picture was about a guy who gets shipwrecked on a little island where there aren't any people except the natives. They were nice simple people and they brought him fruit and water and pretty soon he was all fixed up with the chief's daughter. There was a lot of trouble later on because guys from the ship found the island and they got the idea of making slaves out of the natives. There was a lot of fighting but finally everything turned out all right.

When I came out the heat hit me hard so I ducked into an air-conditioned bar and had a couple of drinks. The picture had gotten my mind off everything for a while, but now it was all starting to come back. What I needed was an island like the guy in the picture, some place I could hole up and forget about everything.

There was the blonde. She had to go and I was afraid to try anything. There was Banghart. I had to get him off my back by Sunday night or I'd be through in town for good. His boys in the blue Nash wouldn't be just watching me: they'd be looking for me.

I finished my drink and went back to my room and stretched out on the bed. I tried to push all thoughts out of my head but it wasn't any good.

The phone rang after a while and it brought me up on one elbow, shaking with fear. I waited until it rang a third time and I picked it up and said, "Yes?"

It was Alice. I was excited and

scared at the same time.

"Where are you?"

"It's all right. I'm phoning from the drug store."

Some of the tightness went out of me and my breath started coming evenly again. "I'm glad you called. What's happening?"

"Nothing. I've been down at the station all day." She sounded tired. "I keep wondering how long this is going to last."

"What did the police want?"

"The whole story, over and over."

"Keep giving it to them, baby. Over and over. And you'd better ask them to let you see Frank."

"I don't want to see him," she said.

"Do what I tell you. You've told the cops you weren't thick with Lesser. They might think it's funny if you don't want to see your husband."

I knew what I was saying was right but I had the uncertain feeling that I was trying to pull too many strings at the same time.

"All right," she said. And I suddenly understood that she felt the same way. "Can't I see you some night?"

I wanted to see her, bad. I knew it was dangerous but I had to be with her soon or I'd go crazy. "I'll fix things and call you," I said. "Don't call me anymore. We're too close to what we want to take any chances."

"All right, Johnny."

She hung up and I turned my face into the pillow. I had a date with the blonde in about an hour and it had me scared. I hated to go out of the room. I wanted to be alone in the dark with enough to drink to make me forget everything.

But the date with the blonde was important. I had to keep her happy until I figured out how to shut her up for good.

I changed my shirt and went down to

gan put his feet on the desk and looked at his hands. His face was tired and lined and he needed a shave, but his eyes still had that quick bright look. Morowitz sat down, too, and just looked at me without any expression at all on his face.

The office was hot and close. There were butts on the floor and there was a rip in the window shade that let a bar of dusty sunlight fall across the floor.

"Any time you're ready," Harrigan said.

The court reporter had his book open and a pencil ready, so I went through the story. I almost had it memorized by this time. I had the funny feeling I'd never talked about anything else in my life.

When I got through Harrigan looked over at Morowitz. "Got any questions?"

Morowitz shrugged. He was a short stocky guy with black hair and sharp eyes. "It all seems pretty clear." He looked at me then and said, "When did you say you talked to Lesser, Ford?"

"About him going up to her place Sunday night? That was Friday afternoon."

"About what time?"

"Pretty early, I guess. We were having lunch."

"I see. And what time did you leave Olsen that night?"

"Around eight-twenty."

"We're sure of that," Harrigan said. "He was in his hotel room at eight-thirty. I talked to the person who was with him at that time."

The court reporter was still taking everything down and I had a feeling of relief. One thing had bothered me about getting rid of the blonde. That was because she was my cover-up on that time angle. But now it was in an official record, in Harrigan's words. That would be just as good a witness as

the blonde.

There weren't any more questions for Morowitz and we talked about nothing in particular for a while. I asked them how the case against Frank was going and Harrigan shrugged his shoulders.

"He claims he didn't do it. The State's Attorney says he did. It'll be up to a jury."

"Have you got a decent case against him?" I said.

Morowitz said, "We've got a decent circumstantial case. We can establish the fact that he had been quarreling with his wife for a week before the murder. We can prove he knew his wife was seeing Lesser that night. And we can place him, by his own admission, in the apartment at eight-thirty, which was the time the neighbors heard the shots fired. It all adds up."

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But the date with the blonde was important. I had to keep her happy until I figured out how to shut her up for good.

I changed my shirt and went down to

my car and drove out to her place. We went to a show because it was dark inside and then we went to a little joint out on the Northwest Side where we had french fried shrimp and beer. She kept smiling at me most of the evening and she seemed all right.

I SAW the blue Nash a couple of times that night. They weren't bothering to hide the fact they were on my trail. After I took the blonde home I wanted to call Alice, but the guys in that Nash were too much on my mind.

The next day was Friday. I had some things to do in the Loop and I wasn't out half an hour before I found out I had a shadow. He was a little guy with thin red hair and glasses, wearing cheap clothes.

He sat at the counter with me while I was having coffee and tomato juice. He was right behind me when I left, and I spotted him two or three more times that morning. At noon I went into a restaurant and ordered a meal. He sat at a table about ten feet away and I heard him ask the waitress for a corned beef sandwich and a cup of coffee.

When I heard that much I got up and walked out. He got up and grabbed his hat and was right behind me when I hit the street. I knew for sure, then, that he was one of Banghart's boys.

I went down the street about half way, then turned and started back, walking fast. He was looking into a sporting goods window when I came up alongside him.

I put a cigarette in my mouth and said, "Got a match?"

He looked at me with a little grin. "Sure, buddy."

He struck the head of a big kitchen match with his thumbnail and held it to my cigarette. When I had a light he blew the match out and tossed it

on the sidewalk.

"Why all the interest?" I said.

He was still grinning. He looked into the sporting goods window and pointed to a rack of shotguns. "You mean in them?" he said.

"Very unfunny," I said. "You've been sticking to me like a mustard plaster this morning. What's the idea?"

"Maybe I like the way you wear clothes," he said.

"You'd better change your tastes," I said.

He kept his grin and said, "Don't shoot off your yap to me, punk. You know why I'm tailing you. And there's not a goddam thing you can do about it."

If I hadn't been in so deep everywhere I'd probably have put a knee into his gut for that, but what he said was so true it made my teeth hurt.

"Don't get too close," I said. "People might think we were friends."

"I wouldn't want that."

I walked away from him and he turned from the window and came after us, his hands stuck in his pockets and that little grin on his face.

When I went back to the hotel he took a seat in the lobby and watched me while I got on the elevator.

That was Friday. Saturday went by and so did Sunday. I went out with the blonde both nights, but Sunday night I got off the street early. That was the night Banghart was waiting for my call.

From nine o'clock Sunday night I stuck in my room with the door locked and the shades down. After about half a bottle it was easy to think I was the only guy alive in the world. The room was dark and quiet and the street noises seemed to be coming from some place a million miles away.

For a while it was easy to think everyone had forgotten about me. Har-

rigan down at the courts building, Alice in her apartment, the blonde out north cooking for her old man, and Banghart smiling at me from his cold face, were all just names of people who'd forgot I'd ever lived.

That was the booze. I laid in bed with my clothes on that night, taking a drink whenever I started to feel my thoughts getting sharp and crowding into my mind. But somewhere in the back of my head a voice was telling me that no matter how drunk I got, Monday morning was going to come.

I MUST have passed out because the next I knew the phone was ringing and the sound drove into my brain like a hot needle.

The room was still dark because the shades were down. My head felt like it was ready to tear open and I was shaking and cold.

I picked up the phone. It was Banghart. He was nice and quiet, like he was talking to some kid.

"I didn't get your call last night, Johnny," he said.

"I haven't got the dough," I said. "I told you I needed a couple of weeks."

"I told you Sunday," he said.

"I know you did, Banghart. But you've got to give me a chance. I'll get the dough for you."

"It's not just the money," he said. "People might get the idea I'm a soft touch if I let you take your time about this. Other people will be telling me that I gave you a break and they'll naturally want the same thing. I might be laughed at for being a sucker. I don't like being laughed at, Johnny."

I felt something crawling in my throat. I knew what he was telling me. I wanted to tell him to go to hell, to scream all the dirty things I could at him and then throw the phone away.

But I couldn't. I couldn't because I wanted to live.

"Banghart, please give me a break," I said. "I'll get your dough. Just give me a little more time."

"How old are you, Johnny?" he said, and I heard him laugh softly.

"I'm twenty-nine."

"It seems to me you've had plenty of time," he said.

"Banghart, please—"

"I'll give you a break. By my clock it's nine-thirty. I'll give you until noon. Fair enough?" I heard him laugh again.

He didn't want his money now. He wanted to step on me like he'd step on a bug, so he could tell everybody how tough he was, but he wanted to let me run around a little just for kicks.

I could hear his soft little laugh as I put the phone back on the hook. The room was quiet and dark and hot. How long could I live up here?

I walked around the room for a while and then I started drinking. There wasn't anything else to do. I was strung up so tight that my mind wouldn't work.

I just knew I was in too deep for anybody to help me and the fear of what was going to happen was sending icy shocks through my whole body. My hands were shaking and my insides felt like they were being twisted and squeezed and torn.

After two drinks I got back in bed and pulled the covers over me trying to get warm. I was sweating in a little while but I was still cold.

Maybe it was the liquor, but while I was laying there my mind started working again. I've lived all my life by playing the angles and now my mind was starting to work automatically, trying to find some loophole, some way out of this mess.

There had to be a way out. I was too close to what I'd gambled for to lay down and quit.

Frank was out of the way and Alice was mine. With the blonde taken care of, everything would be set. Banghart was the only thing in the way.

I pushed the covers off and went in and got under the shower. I turned the cold water on and stood under it with my head bent down and let it drive into the back of my neck. I must have stayed there for fifteen minutes, but when I got out the fog was out of my head.

THERE was only one thing I could do and that was run. I had a car and a thousand bucks. That was an angle. I'd take Alice and clear the hell out. The coppers had nothing on us, and I knew places on the West Coast where they'd never find us anyway.

I dressed, then called the switchboard.

"Don't let anyone up to see me," I said. "Do you understand? Nobody."

She said all right and I put the phone down and walked around the room for a while thinking about what I had to do. I couldn't bother with the blonde. That was too risky and there wasn't enough time. I knew she might get Harrigan after me when she started squawking, but I had to take that chance.

Banghart was the one that stood in my way. I had to get past him and it had to be done fast. There wasn't any time to play around because when he started after me it would be quick and final.

I sat down on the edge of the bed and put a cigarette in my mouth. A lot of ideas and angles went through my head. Finally they clicked together and I almost grinned. Banghart might

get himself a little surprise.

I picked up the phone and told the operator to get me the house dick, a guy named Morrison. He'd been a city copper for six years before he got bounced for taking too big a cut on the pay-off on his beat. He'd taken a plenty big cut from me ever since I'd been in the hotel and I knew I could ask him for a favor.

When I got him on the wire I said, "Morrison, this is Johnny Ford. Listen there's a guy in the lobby that's been on my tail for the last couple of days. I want to talk to him. Will you bring him up here for me?"

"I heard you're in trouble, Johnny," he said.

"So what? Will you get this guy for me?"

"All right. What's he look like?"

"He's a little guy with red hair. He's wearing glasses. He'll be sitting on one of the chairs where he can watch the elevator. Take his gun away from him and bring him up."

I hung up and got my gun out of the dresser. I made sure it was loaded and the safety was on. I dropped it into my pocket and sat down to wait.

Morrison showed in about fifteen minutes with the little redhead. He shoved him into the room and said, "He's clean, Johnny."

Morrison stood there, a sloppy looking guy who drank too much beer, waiting for a handout. I gave him a fin and closed the door.

The redhead was standing in the middle of the room. He was watching me with a little grin and not looking at all nervous.

I said, "Sit down. Maybe we got something to talk about."

"I don't think so, buddy," he said, but he took a seat and fished through the pocket of his suit for a cigarette.

I took the gun out of my pocket and

went over and stood in front of him.
"What's the interest in me?"

He blew smoke at me. "I don't know anything. I was minding my own business in the lobby, punk." He grinned at me and put the cigarette in his mouth and let it hang there.

I slapped him across the face with the barrel of the gun. The cigarette went flying out of his lips. He cursed and ducked down and then I jerked my knee into his face and straightened him back in the chair. He sank back away from me and he had a mad, scared looked on his face.

"Who put you on my tail?" I said.

I had to hit him some more. He was stubborn but after a while the mad look was gone from his face and he started to get soft.

He said, "Banghart."

I knew that, but I had to start somewhere. "What's the idea?"

"He just told me to keep an eye on you. I don't know what the idea is."

"You got to do better than that? What were you supposed to do if I took a powder?"

"Let him know, that's all."

"That what was going to happen?"

"Christ, I don't know. He never tells me anything."

"Let's try it again. What's going to happen if I try and blow town?"

"I don't know."

I HAD to work on him again and this time I worked hard. When he was blubbering and trying so hard to talk that he sounded half crazy, I stopped.

"Let's have it all."

"He's going to get you. When I know where you're going tonight, I'm supposed to let him know."

"When did you last talk to him?"

"About an hour ago."

My watch said one. He'd waited until twelve, right on the dot, and then

he'd started to put his foot down on the bug. Well I still had a way out.

"How was he going to do it?"

"I don't know. You gotta believe me. He just wanted me to tell him where you were going this afternoon or tonight."

I sat down and lit a cigarette and tried to think. The little redhead just sat there, all the toughness gone, moping at the blood on his face with a handkerchief.

"Want a drink?" I said.

He didn't believe I meant it, but he bobbed his head. I made two drinks and gave him one. I sat down and sipped at mine and kept thinking.

The thing came to me in one piece. Like the first idea about getting rid of Frank. It was just there, all neat and perfect. I turned it around a few times and it looked okay from every angle.

This would take care of everything. The blonde and Banghart and the heat that was on me. It would leave me and Alice in the clear to get out, and get out fast.

I said to the redhead, "What's your name?"

"Kiley," he said.

"Okay, Kiley, you're going to call Banghart. You're going to tell him just what I tell you."

He started to whimper. "You're going to get me killed. He'll kill me if I do that."

I stood up and went over in front of him again. "I won't kill you," I said. "But you'll wish I did."

He thought that over and I guess he knew I wasn't just talking. When he nodded, I said, "Here's what you tell him. Tell him you saw me come downstairs about twelve-thirty and that I went to the TWA ticket office and bought a one-way ticket to New York for tonight. Tell him you heard me say I wouldn't need the limousine service

out to the airport because I was driving. Got that much?"

He looked at me and nodded slowly.

"Okay. Then tell him the flight is for eleven o'clock and that I told the desk clerk to have my car ready by ten. Get that straight. The car is to be ready at ten. Also, tell him I was packing a gun and that I looked nervous."

I shoved him over to the phone and sat down beside him on the bed and put the gun against his back. When I gave him the phone, I said, "Keep it away from your ear while you're talking. I want to hear, too. And you only get one strike in this league. Remember that."

He called a number and when a voice answered he said, "This is Kiley. I want to talk to Banghart."

There was a wait and he licked his lips and shot a look down at the gun.

"It's here," I said.

AFTER a moment, he spoke into the phone. "Banghart? Kiley. He's ready to blow. He just got a ticket for the eleven o'clock flight to New York. He's going to drive out to the airport. What? I heard him tell the desk clerk to have his car ready at ten o'clock. Nervous as a cat. He's heeled."

I leaned closer when Banghart talked. I heard him say, "Okay, Kiley. Ten o'clock and he's driving. Is that it?"

"Yeah."

"The lobby."

"All right. Keep your eye on him and let me know if there are any changes. We'll take care of the rest."

I heard his soft little laugh as I took the phone away from the redhead and put it back where it belonged.

He was staring down at his hands.

"He'll kill me when he finds out."

I felt like grinning. "Everybody's got problems," I said.

I called Morrison then and told him to come up and get the guy. When he showed I told him I wanted the redhead put away where he couldn't see anybody or get to a phone for at least twenty-four hours.

Morrison took him by the shoulder and started for the door. "I'll have him booked at Central for carrying a gun. I'll tell the boys to keep him quiet until tomorrow night."

He went out with the redhead and I knew he'd keep his word! I could depend on him. He was a crook and you can generally depend on crooks. They act the way you expect them to, but with an honest guy there's no telling what he'll do.

Morrison would keep the redhead from calling Banghart back and telling him what had happened. That meant I was set for the rub out tonight when I started for the airport. The way to the airport from the Loop is out Archer avenue, and there are lots of nice dark stretches along that road.

I was depending on that and a few other things. One of those things was that Banghart knew I was nervous and that I was carrying a gun. That would make his boys careful. They'd do a quick job and they wouldn't get too close to my car, because they'd be afraid I might start shooting.

That was important.

I called the blonde then, and when she got on the phone, I said, "This is Johnny, honey. How're things?"

She sounded glad to hear from me. "I wasn't expecting you to call, Johnny. I just washed my hair and I was sitting by the window letting it dry. I look terrible."

"I don't believe it," I said. "Look, honey, here's why I called. A friend of mine is coming in tonight at the air-

port. I'm tied up in a deal and I was wondering if you'd take my car and drive out there and pick him up."

"Gosh, I don't have a driver's license, Johnny."

"Don't worry about that. If any cop stops you tell 'em you're Johnny Ford's girl. Will you do, it honey?"

"Well, sure, Johnny. If you say it's all right about the license."

"That's fine. Supposing you come down here around eight. We'll have dinner here in my room. When you get back from the airport we'll go out and see the sights."

"All right, Johnny. I'll be down at eight."

"Swell, honey."

I hung up and fixed myself a drink. I started figuring out the angles. I tried to keep myself from thinking about what would happen to the blonde.

But I couldn't think about anything else. When she pulled out of the garage at ten o'clock, Banghart's boys would follow her out Archer avenue. When she hit a dark spot in the road they'd pull up beside her and she'd be out of the way for good.

That would put plenty of heat on Banghart. He could rub me out and nobody would care much, but a young girl that wasn't in the rackets would cause one hell of a mess. The cops would give him something to worry about besides stepping on bugs.

When he had time to look for me I'd be gone. Alice would be with me and we could laugh at him and the cops and everybody else. Nobody had anything on us, but I wouldn't take any chances, and when I got to the Coast I'd know how to stay out of sight.

There was one chance of a hitch. That was if Banghart's men recognized the blonde in my car. They might, because she had fuzzy blonde hair and if they spotted that through the rear win-

dow they'd know I'd pulled a switch. They'd turn around and come back to the hotel for me if that happened.

I had to figure a way around that. An idea came to me and I went over and rummaged through the drawers of the dresser. I found it all right, a checked cap I used to wear out at the track. That might be it, but it wasn't sure-fire, and I realized then that her shining blonde hair might be the thing that could wreck this whole deal.

CHAPTER XIV

ABOUT five o'clock it started to rain.

I went over and looked out the window. The rain would make it hard to see twenty feet, and this was Chicago rain, coming down straight and hard and bringing a misty fog that clouded up windows and put a blanket of steam over everything.

That would help.

I finished the drink I had and made another. I'd been drinking all afternoon but it wasn't doing me much good. I was wound up tight and it was because I knew that Banghart's men might recognize the blonde.

The cap wasn't a very good idea. I picked it up and looked at it for a moment or so, then tossed it back on the bed. She might simply refuse to wear the damn thing.

She never wore hats, just little bows in her hair, and she liked to wear it shoulder length and fluffed out in a big yellow cloud. She was proud of her hair and she wouldn't see any need to cover it, because she would be driving in a closed car.

I might talk her into wearing it, but there was no way I could be sure she wouldn't take it off after she left the garage. If Banghart's men spotted that blonde hair. . . .

She was due at eight and I didn't

know how I'd get by until she arrived. Time was dragging by and the tight feeling inside me was getting worse every minute. I kept drinking and with the rain steaming past the windows and darkness starting to crowd into the room, nothing seemed very real.

I got through it somehow. At eight o'clock she knocked on the door. Then I let her in and saw what she was wearing. I almost went weak with relief. She had on a raincoat with one of those hoods that attach to the collar and it covered up everything but her face. At twenty feet, unless you noticed her legs, you couldn't tell whether she was a man or woman.

And once she was sitting in the car, I knew no one would notice her legs.

She was smiling. "How do you like this? I look just like an Eskimo, don't I?"

"It's perfect, honey."

She came into the room and untied the draw strings that pulled the hood tight under her chin. She threw it back and her fluffed out, long and blonde and shiny.

"I know I look terrible," she said. "I washed my hair this afternoon and it's just a mess now. Can I go into the bathroom and fix myself up a little?"

She went in and closed the door after her, and I picked up the checkered cap from the bed and put it back in the drawer. I wouldn't need that now.

The hood was perfect. With that over her hair and the windows of the car rolled up there was no chance of Banghart's men spotting her for a girl.

When she came out she had the raincoat over her arm and I took it from her and hung it in the closet. I came back and sat down in the big chair and she sat on the arm and ran her fingers through my hair. She looked cute and young that night, with a white wool sweater that fitted her close and a dark

skirt with a lot of pleats across the front. She put her arms around me then and hugged me tightly.

"Gosh, I love you," she said, and laughed a little.

Her body was soft and slight and she had a clean sweet smell about her like a baby. I felt something crawling in my throat. I tried to push the thoughts out of my head.

"We need a drink," I said, and got up quickly.

She looked hurt but she took it all right and I made two drinks. Mine was stiff and I needed it bad. After that I asked her about dinner. She decided what she wanted and I phoned room service and gave the order.

She said then, "Johnny, how am I going to recognize this friend of yours at the airport? Does he know I'm going to pick him up?"

"Sure. I called him long distance after I talked to you this afternoon."

"What's the best way to go out there?"

MY THROAT felt dry and I took a long swallow from my drink. "Take Archer avenue. Go out Clark Street and you'll hit Archer about twenty hundred south. It angles out southwest, you know. It's the best route."

"All right. Will we have to go out with this friend of yours tonight?"

"Not if you don't want to."

"I don't really care, but I'd rather be with you alone."

"That's the way it will be then, honey."

I couldn't look at her any more. I made another drink and I kept my eyes on the drink, or the floor, or the window, or any damn place but her soft little face and long shining hair.

The food came up then but I couldn't eat. She was hungry and kept telling me how good everything was, but the

first mouthful I took almost gagged me. I drank some coffee, while she finished her dinner.

When she was through she said, "What time do I have to leave?"

"About ten."

"It's only nine now," she said, with a little smile, and then she went over and stretched out on the bed. I sat beside her and held her hand. She was looking at me and she was still smiling and I knew what she wanted me to do, but I couldn't. The thought of that made me feel like vomiting.

We talked for an hour. She was happy enough just doing anything I wanted, and all I could do now was talk and I did that to keep from thinking.

About ten minutes to ten I looked at my watch. That was a bad moment. I was tight and dry and there was something that seemed to be crawling in my throat.

She saw me look at my watch and she swung her legs off the side of the bed and stood up. "I'll put on a new face and be ready in a minute."

She went into the bathroom and I got her rain coat from the closet. I looked at the hood and it reminded me of pictures I've seen of the thing they wrap around corpses. A shroud I guess is what they call them.

When she came out I held the rain coat for her and when she buttoned it up the front, I said, "Better put the hood up. It's still raining."

"I won't need it now," she said. "I wore it coming down because I took the street car, but I won't have to wear it driving, it musses my hair up anyway."

She put her hand on the doorknob, but I took her by the shoulders and turned her around.

"Please wear it, honey. You look cute as hell in it."

She smiled. "Do I? I never thought it made me look very good. Maybe I'll

put it on at the airport because I'll probably have to get out and look for this friend of yours. What's his name, anyway?"

"Jackson," I said. "Eddie Jackson."

I was tighter then a violin string, I turned her so she was facing me and started to pull the hood over her hair, but she backed away from me and seemed a little annoyed.

"Don't, Johnny. I really don't want to wear it. Does it make any difference?"

"I just want to see how you look in it again."

"Oh, all right. You are silly tonight."

She slipped the hood over her head and tucked a few strands of hair out of sight. Then she pulled the draw strings up tight under her chin and made a face at me.

"Satisfied?"

"You look wonderful."

I TOOK the drawstrings from her hands and pulled them up nice and snug. I tied a knot in them and leaned forward and kissed her, and while I was doing that I made another quick knot and pulled it tight. She didn't realize what I was doing until I stopped kissing her. She began fumbling with the knot, but her hands were in an awkward position and it was in tight. She picked at it a moment before she said, "Now look what you've done with your fooling around!"

"Let me try," I said. I took the strings and pretended to work at the knot but I pulled it as tight as I could, until I was sure she couldn't untie it, and then I shook my head and said, "The strings must be wet or something, honey. Hell, wear it that way. You don't know how cute you look."

She fumbled with the knot again and I looked at my watch.

She made an exasperated little ges-

ture and said, "Oh, all right, I'll wear it this way. It's late, isn't it?"

"You've got enough time," I said. "I'll take you down to the car."

The elevator went all the way down to the garage and I told the mechanic to get my car out. There was a ramp leading up from the garage to the street and we waited at the foot of the ramp.

The mechanic brought the car over and she climbed into the front seat. When she had closed the door and started the motor she looked up at me and smiled. "Your friend will probably think I'm bald headed because I've got this hood on."

"Better roll the windows up," I said.

"All right. What are we going to do tonight?"

"Anything you want." My voice croaked in my ears. I wanted her to get out of there, so I couldn't see her or hear her any more. I couldn't stand looking at her, and watching her small white face.

"As long as your with me I don't care," she said. She pursed her lips in a little kiss and said, "I love you, Johnny."

I tried to say something, but I couldn't. The thing in my throat seemed to be strangling me and all I could do was look at her and know that I was going to be sick.

Maybe she didn't expect me to say anything because she rolled the windows up and that made her face just a white blur inside the car. The mechanic pressed a button that opened the garage doors, then he walked outside in the rain and looked up and down the street. He waved to her to come ahead and she let out the clutch and went up the ramp. She turned right and rolled out of sight.

I walked up the ramp but I kept on one side where I couldn't be seen from

the street. The mechanic pressed the button again and as the doors started to close I saw the blue Nash go by. There were two men in front and one in back. The one in back was sitting forward on the edge of the seat.

I went up to my room as fast as I could. I locked the door and pulled down the shades and turned off the lights. I found the bottle in the dark and fell on the bed and stuck it into my mouth and let the whiskey pour straight into my throat.

I was trying to kill the thing that was there, the thing that was strangling me, and I wanted to burn every thought I'd ever had out of my head.

The stuff went down but it wouldn't stay. I got to the bathroom just in time. Everything came up and it almost tore me to pieces. After a while I went back to bed. My heart was pumping heavily. What I thought about I'll never know. Things were just flickering into my mind, little splintered thoughts that made me twist and moan and dig my fingers into my face.

A long time must have passed. I didn't think about anything going wrong. That was funny. I knew it would work.

THE room was quiet and dark but inside my mind there were noises and lights that seemed louder and brighter than anything in the world. I saw the shine of Alice's eyes, and Harrigan's tired, thin face and behind them stood Banghart, looking at me with his cold half-smile. Their voices seemed to be all around me, louder and louder, but they weren't speaking words, and over them I could hear the blonde's little giggle and underneath everything, swelling up and up, was the splintering chatter of machine guns.

I scrambled up from the bed and snapped on a light. The noises and

faces faded away, and I put both hands tightly against my face and sat on the edge of the bed. Time must have passed.

When the phone rang I knew that it was all over. I picked it up and put it to my ear.

"Johnny? This is Harrigan."

"Yeah?"

"Johnny, I got bad news for you. I hate to be the one to tell you, but—Your girl was killed about an hour ago. She was driving southwest on Archer Avenue in your car."

I started to cry. I knew it was going to happen. I was the one who had made it happen but I started to cry.

He heard it, I guess, because he said, "I'm sorry as hell, Johnny. I was at the morgue when they brought her in. That's why I called you. I—I want to talk to you about it."

"All right. I'll come down. Was it an accident?" I had to ask that question.

"No, it wasn't Johnny. That's why I want to see you. She was killed by some hoods. They let her have it with a machine gun just the other side of Springfield avenue. Can you get down right away?"

"I'll be out," I said.

I got up off the bed and I was shaking so I could hardly keep on my feet. For a moment I thought I would be sick again, but it passed, and I went in and got washed. When I dried my face and looked in the mirror I was clean. I hadn't expected to look clean.

CHAPTER XV

I TOOK a cab out to the morgue. The rain was still coming down and the streets were black and shiny. I went downstairs to the iceboxes. The morgue has the kind of smell you would expect. The floors are made of rough concrete

and the lights are strong and white.

Harrigan was standing at the double doors leading to the iceboxes. When I saw who was with him I felt things inside me turn over. It was her old man. He was wearing his good dark suit and it was wet and a little steam was coming up from the shoulders. He was smoking his pipe in short little puffs, but his face was just the same, like something cut out of wood and covered with leather.

He looked at me and then back at the floor without saying a word.

Harrigan said, "I'm sorry, Johnny." I didn't say anything.

"Well, let's go in," he said.

He pushed open the door and we followed him into the big room where the bodies are kept in refrigerated boxes. There must have been a couple of hundred boxes in there with neat little tags on the handles, and the lights are brighter than outside and there's a trough around the wall for the water to run out when they hose down the floor.

A morgue attendant swung one of the doors open and rolled out a slab. They slide out like ice cube trays and the rollers must be well oiled because you can't hear any creaking.

I don't know how long we stood there looking at her. I couldn't look at anything but the knotted drawstrings that pulled the hood tight about her face. The knots were still there, nice and tight.

The old man made a noise in his throat and then he suddenly pushed himself in front of me and spread his arms out wide as if to keep me from looking at her.

"You killed her," he cried. His face was still the same, hard and lined and rough, but his voice sounded like something was tearing. "You come around with your big car and your sporty clothes and the money you steal from

people and you made her go with you. That killed her. That's why she is dead."

He lifted his fist slowly like he was raising a hammer, but then the noise came from his throat again and he dropped his hand to his side and stood there looking at me, breathing hard and blinking his eyes rapidly.

"Go away from her," he said. "Leave her alone."

Harrigan touched my arm and we went outside. All I could see were the knots under her chin. I knew it wouldn't help to close my eyes.

Harrigan said, "Who was after you, Johnny?"

"Banghart. I went short on a bet."

"Why did you let her take your car? Didn't you have sense enough to realize this might happen?"

"I didn't think about it. She wanted to go for a ride. I was busy, so I let her take the car."

"Okay, we'll get after him," he said. He gave me a funny look and said, "I'll be seeing you, Johnny."

I didn't know what he meant. I didn't care. I went outside and got a cab and gave the driver Alice's address.

The pressure was off me. Banghart had trouble of his own now, and we had to move fast while he was busy thinking about his own hide. Frank was out of the way and I had Alice.

That's what I'd killed for and that's what I intended to get.

When I got out to her place it was almost two o'clock. The rain had stopped and the air had a cool clean smell. I went into the vestibule of her apartment and rang the bell. When she answered I told her who it was and she pressed the buzzer.

I went up the steps fast. I couldn't wait to get to her.

SHE was standing in the doorway with a housecoat pulled around her and

her hair down to her shoulders. I caught her in my arms and pulled her inside and kicked the door shut. .

We didn't talk. I pulled her closer to me and held her that way until I could feel her starting to strain and twist against me. Then I shoved her away from me and I could see her eyes shining in the dark.

I picked her up and carried her to the couch. I had never wanted her like this before. I don't know how much time passed, but the tightness went out of me and while I was lying there with her I knew I'd have done everything over again for just this one time.

I said, "Is there a drink left?"

"Some gin is all."

"Gin's fine."

She got the gin and we drank it with cold water. We didn't talk for a while. We just laid there in the dark, close together, sipping our drinks. Finally she said, "Is it all right for you to be here, Johnny?"

"Tomorrow morning we're clearing out, baby. That's why I'm here," I said.

She was so still that she didn't seem to be breathing.

"How about the police?" she said, after a little pause.

"They haven't got anything on us. They might want us as witnesses, but we can't wait around. There's an early flight to the Coast this morning and we're taking it."

"What's happened, Johnny?"

I didn't have to tell her, but I did. "I'm in trouble, baby. Real trouble. A guy by the name of Banghart is after me and I've got to get out. The blonde who was covering up for me got killed tonight. I just came from the morgue. Banghart's men did it and he'll be busy with the cops for a few days. While he's busy we're clearing out."

"How was she killed?"

"She got shot. She was driving in

my car and they pulled up and did a fancy job on her with a machine gun."

"They thought she was you, didn't they?" she said.

"I guess they did. But it's worked out fine for us. We're getting out now. This is what we killed Lesser for and we're going to grab it while we can."

She was quiet for a long while and then she said, in a soft, far-away voice, "You killed Lesser, didn't you Johnny?"

"I killed him," I said. "Frank just slugged him and walked out. I came in afterwards and let him have it."

"I knew it was odd that Frank kept saying he didn't. He never lied about anything, and if he'd killed him he would have said so. I think I knew all along that you did it."

"I'd do it again," I said. I didn't know why I felt like talking, but the words were spilling out and it did me good to hear them. "I've killed for you, baby, and I'm going to have you. I fixed it so the blonde would get killed tonight. She knew enough to cause me trouble and she had to go. I'm not leaving anybody around who can send me to the chair. If it's me or somebody else—well, Johnny comes first."

We were quiet for a while. Finally she said, "What time is it now, Johnny?"

I looked at my watch. "Three o'clock. It's time for me to get out. There's a lot to be done before seven in the morning. I've got to get all the dough I can, get the tickets and pack what I'll need."

"You can wait a little longer," she said.

IT WAS almost three thirty when I went to the door. She came with me and when I was ready to go she pulled me close to her and kissed me hard on the lips. I saw that she was

crying.

"Don't worry, baby, I'll be back in a few hours. Just pack enough to last you a few days. To hell with everything else."

"Good bye, Johnny," she whispered.

I went down the steps and over to Sheridan Road, looking for a cab. I stood there for about fifteen minutes and then I decided the L would be a better bet. I walked back to the L station at Granville and waited about another fifteen minutes for a train to the Loop.

When I got downtown it was almost four-thirty. The first thing I did when I went into the lobby of the hotel was to write a check for eleven hundred dollars, which would clean me out at the bank.

The night clerk looked at it for a moment, shaking his head slowly.

"This is rather steep, Mr. Ford. I'm not authorized to cash checks this large."

"Hell, you know me."

He looked at the check for a while. Then he smiled.

"I guess it's all right. You're one of our regulars. The rule is really to prevent fly-by-nighters from overdrawing their accounts and clearing out of town before we can get the check to the bank."

With the money in my pocket I had about fifteen hundred dollars. I went up to my room and called TWA. The girl who answered the phone told me she couldn't get my two seats through to California, but she could promise me a ride as far as Denver. That was all right, so I told her I'd pick up the tickets at the airport. With that out of the way I felt better. From Denver we could wait for a flight west or hop one of the Chiefs.

I packed in a hurry. I got out a small grip and put in my shaving things,

and then I threw in a few extra shirts and some socks and underwear.

There was still plenty of time so I took a quick shower and put on clean clothes and the gabardine suit. After that I sat down at the desk and went through all the drawers and made a nice pile out of my letters, betting slips and things like that, tore them all in little strips and tossed them into the waste basket.

I was feeling all right. The tightness that had been with me for the last week seemed to leave, and I felt clean and wide awake and excited.

At six o'clock I was ready, so I called Alice. I sat on the edge of the bed with a fresh cigarette and listened to her phone ring. It rang four times before I got worried. I knew she might be taking a bath or something, but she should be able to hear the phone.

I let it ring about a dozen times before I got the operator and told her to dial the number again. She made another connection and pretty soon I heard her phone buzzing again. I let it ring about twenty times before I hung up.

I SAT there and finished the cigarette. The room was quiet and my thoughts were twisting around and I started to feel the tight ache inside me once more.

She should be home. I walked around the room a while, then decided to start out there. She might have gone out to get a bottle of cream for coffee or something, but it was crazy of her to waste time.

I picked up my grip, took a last look around the room and went down the corridor to the elevator. On the way down I checked everything over in my mind, and there wasn't a hitch except that Alice wasn't home. I didn't like that.

There wasn't much going on in the

lobby. A janitor was moving around slowly with a mop, getting in a few last touches before the crowds started coming in, and there was a tired-looking couple standing at the reservation window, and they had the hopeless look of people who want a place to sleep and are listening to a guy explaining how tough things are and how sorry he is that he can't help them out.

I dropped my cigarette into one of the sand-filled vases beside the elevator and started to cross the lobby. Half-way across it I noticed a car pull up at the entrance.

Three men got out and pushed their way through the revolving door. They were walking fast toward the desk, and their faces were hard and serious.

The guy in front was Harrigan. Maybe if I'd kept walking they wouldn't have noticed me, but I stood there frozen. One of them spotted me and they all turned and came over to me, fast.

Harrigan looked tired. He needed a shave and his thin face under the rim of his hat brim looked sour and mean. He looked at the grip I was carrying.

"Going somewhere?" he said.

The two guys with him came around on either side of me and I swallowed hard to get the sudden dryness out of my throat.

"Business trip," I said.

"Not today," Harrigan said. "Put that grip down. Look him over, boys."

I put the grip down and they went over me fast. When they were through Harrigan said, "Let's go. We want to talk to you at Central."

"Now wait a minute," I said. The words came out jerkily. I knew talking wouldn't help, but the words spilled out anyway. "I got things to do. You can't drag me in like this. What's this all about?"

"Let's go," Harrigan said.

CHAPTER XVI

THEY took me to a dirty room on the fifth floor of Central Station at Eleventh and State. There was a desk with cigarette burns all over the top and five or six wooden chairs with broken rungs. The smell of stale smoke and dirty clothes hung in the air.

Harrigan told me to take a chair beside the desk. One of the guys who'd brought me in went out, and the other copper, a big pale guy named Slade, sat down in a chair against the wall.

The door opened and Morowitz, the assistant State's Attorney came in, looking like he'd just got out of bed. His dark hair was still rumpled and he needed a shave, but his eyes weren't sleepy.

He bent over and whispered something to Harrigan. Harrigan nodded slowly and they looked over at me and I knew this wasn't any funny business. His face was hard and grave.

He said, "Better make up your mind to level with us, Johnny. We know you've been living with Olsen's wife while he was overseas. Was that why you wanted him out of the way?"

They knew about us. I didn't know how much else they knew, but they had a good start. They had the one thing I was afraid all along they might get.

Harrigan was staring at me. "Don't feel very talkative huh? All right. I'll do the talking. First, about that time gag of yours the night Lesser got killed. You said you were in your room at eight-thirty. Your little blonde friend who was killed tonight said the same thing. That's right, isn't it."

"You're doing the talking," I said.

"Sure I am. We checked with the telephone operator at your hotel about that. She remembered the call. You asked her what time a play at the Selwyn started. You asked her to find out

and call you back. She did and she said eight-thirty. That's what your girl friend heard. Actually the operator called you back after nine o'clock. Where were you at eight-thirty, Johnny?"

I just looked at him. There wasn't anything to say. I didn't know how much he had. I didn't know where Alice was. They might be questioning her right now, trying to break her down the same way. All I could do was keep my mouth shut tight.

"I'll tell you where you were," Harrigan said. "You were in her apartment at eight-thirty. You shot Lesser at eight-thirty, Johnny, and we know you did."

THE tightness inside me was getting worse. He had me on a bad spot, but I knew enough to keep quiet. Guys hang themselves by talking. The cops catch them in a few lies, and they start talking, trying to cover up, and they tell more lies and pretty soon they're in so deep that the cops just sit back and listen to the guy spill his guts.

Harrigan said, "Nothing to say to that, Johnny?"

"I'll talk to a lawyer."

"No lawyer in the world will help you now," he said. He lit a cigarette. "But here's another thing you can tell your lawyer. You claimed you talked to Lesser Friday afternoon and that he told you he was going up to her apartment Sunday night. We've got your statement on that with three witnesses. That's where you made an accidental little slip, Johnny. You see, we checked and we found out that Lesser wasn't in town Friday. He went out to Gary on a business trip."

"It could have been Thursday," I said.

"Maybe you just lied. You didn't talk to Lesser at all," he said.

"I could have been mistaken about the day," I said.

"Sure you could. But you weren't. Here's what happened and when I get through you can tell me if it looks like a mistake. You were living with Frank Olsen's wife. When he came back from the army you decided to get rid of him. You were either too smart or too gutless to do the job yourself, so you fixed it so he'd put himself out of the way. You steamed him up about his wife's unfaithfulness, and then you arranged to have Lesser go up to her apartment Sunday night. When you got that set you told him about it, knowing that he'd go crazy and run back there and blow hell out of Lesser. That's the way you figured it. That would take care of everything. He'd get sent up on a murder rap and you'd have his wife. But it didn't work. He walked in, slugged Lesser and his wife and then walked out. You were watching from across the street. When you saw him come up you went up to see what happened. That's when you got the bright idea of shooting Lesser yourself, knowing Frank Olsen would get the blame. And that's what you did. You shot Lesser with Olsen's souvenir gun and then got back to your hotel room and fixed an alibi for eight-thirty." He leaned forward and said, "Got anything to say now?"

HE HAD it all. He hadn't missed a thing. He had me cold—if he had any proof. But it might be just a smart guess. The thing a cop needs before he goes to court on a murder case is a witness. And that was one thing he didn't have. All the guess work in the world is no good unless there is proof to back it up, and a witness to put the finger on you.

"Ready to talk?" Harrigan said.

"Go to hell. You haven't got any-

thing but a fairy story. It's clever, but take the damn thing into any court and a lawyer will tear you apart."

"We got more," he said.

"Fine," I said. "So I'm a murderer because I made a mistake about what day I had lunch with some guy. And because some goddamn dumb telephone operator tells you a wild story about how I fixed up an alibi on the time. Is that your idea of proof?"

"You were living with Alice Olsen, weren't you?"

"That's wonderful. So I was living with some guy's wife. Does that mean I shot a guy and pinned it on her husband?"

"It's happened before," he said. He was grinning.

I didn't like that grin. He acted as though he was letting me talk for laughs.

"Well," I said. "What's the deal? Book me and lead me to a telephone, or let me get the hell out of here."

"We're going to book you, Johnny."

"On what charge?"

"Murder."

He said it so quietly that I knew he had a case. There was something he wasn't telling me, and that wound me up so tight inside that I knew I was at the breaking point. I tried to light a cigarette, but my hands were trembling so badly that I burned my fingers. I gave it up and tossed the cigarette on the floor.

"Where's your proof?" I said.

"You'll get your proof. You're going to get it right between the eyes. You're going to fall apart and I'm going to enjoy watching the pieces hit the floor."

He nodded to the copper sitting in the chair by the wall. The copper stood up and went out the door. Harrigan and Morowitz got to their feet.

I felt then like I was starting to come apart inside. Harrigan and Moro-

witz were watching the door and I watched it, too, waiting for what was going to happen.

The room was quiet and the only sound I could hear was the heavy pounding of my heart.

The door opened and the copper came back into the room. He was so big that I didn't see her right away. When he stepped aside she was standing there, looking cool and hard, and when I saw her the tightness inside me seemed to break and everything in me just melted.

She looked straight at Harrigan. My mind was saying her name over and over but my lips were stiff and hard.

Harrigan said, "Mrs. Olsen, for the benefit of Johnny Ford, we want you to repeat what you told us earlier this morning. I think it will convince him we've got a case."

"All right," she said.

I never saw her look better. She had on a tailored white suit and her hair and make-up were done perfectly. There were blue shadows under her eyes but they made her skin look softer and whiter. Her hair was shining blackly, and her eyes were shining, too, and the cold, wild streak in her was so close to the surface that it made her look like a different woman.

She said, in a low, even voice; "My husband came home the night Lesser was in my apartment. He hit Lesser several times and then he slapped me hard enough to knock me unconscious. When I came to, Johnny Ford was in the room. I saw him go into the bedroom, and when he came out he had my husband's gun in his hand. He shot Lesser, then left the apartment by the back door. Is that all you want?"

"That's all I want," Harrigan said.

"May I go now?"

"Of course."

She hadn't looked at me once. She told the story without a change in her voice and she kept her eyes on Harrigan.

When he said she could go, she smiled at him, and then she turned and went through the door. Harrigan closed it after her and came over and sat down behind the desk.

"Let's have it all," he said.

I heard the words but they were just noises. They didn't mean anything. Nothing meant anything. She had turned me in to save her hide. The girl I'd killed for, stole for, wrecked everything for, had stood there, without a change of expression, and told a lie that would send me straight to the chair.

"You'll get it all," I said.

She had lied. She hadn't seen me shoot Lesser. She had been unconscious. She knew I shot him because I had told her I did.

"I'm waiting," he said.

I couldn't fight anymore. There wasn't anything in me that wanted to fight. I was trying to think, trying to see how her mind had worked. Maybe she hadn't trusted me after I told her I'd killed Lesser and the blonde. Maybe she figured that some day I might kill her because she knew too much.

WHEN we had been in each other's arms a few hours before, I'd said to her, "I'm not leaving anybody around that can send me to the chair. If it's me or somebody else—well, Johnny comes first."

She must have made up her mind then while we were there on the couch. Maybe that was why she'd said good-bye to me when I left, and maybe that was why she was crying. Because she knew that when I went down the steps I was going out of her life forever.

"Talk," Harrigan said.

"When did she call you?"

"About a quarter of four."

"What did she tell you?"

"Just what you heard. She said she'd kept quiet because she was afraid of what you might do. She claims she had nothing to do with the frame-up on her husband."

"She said that?"

"That's her story, but she's lying. She was in this thing with you right up to her dirty neck. I'll get her, too. I listened to her story because I knew when I got you I'd get the rest of it. You can fix her now."

There was a knock on the door and a copper came in and said something to Harrigan.

Harrigan grinned at me, but it was the way he'd grin at something crawling out from under a damp log. Just before he would step on it.

"Olsen's outside. We brought him over here when she got through singing. He wants to see you alone. The poor guy deserves that much."

He and Morowitz and Slade went out and I was left alone in the dirty room with the stale smell of cigarette smoke.

A few seconds went by and then her husband came in, looking terrible. His eyes were red and wild and he came over to me, his hands working nervously. He looked big and he looked mad.

"They told me everything, Johnny," he said. He stood there, just looking at me and working his hands. He said in a ragged voice, "Johnny, was she in on it? Tell me that, Johnny, or I'll kill you right now."

I didn't care if he killed me because I knew nothing could ever hurt me again. Alice had done that to me and left herself in the clear. I could drag her in with me and that was what Harrigan expected me to do. I could tell

the whole story and she'd be done for.

I wanted to fix her, I wanted to hurt her like she'd hurt me. But this wasn't the way to do it.

There was another way, a horrible way—for her. If I turned on her now she could stand it. The mean tough streak in her would fight back hard. That would make her hate me, and she'd be happy the night I went to the chair.

HARRIGAN might send her up but she could stand that, because she was tough and hard. And she'd spend those years hating her husband, hating me, and that would keep her alive.

I didn't want her to live. I wanted her to take the same trip I was going to take.

There was a way.

"Frank, she's clean," I said. "I made her do what she did. She was clean all the time and she loved you, but she was afraid of me. Don't believe anything else, Frank."

He blinked his eyes and then he started to blubber. His big thick face was working to keep the tears back.

"I knew she wasn't in it! I knew it! I got to get to her."

He looked wildly around the room, as if he didn't know where to go. Then he saw the door and went out, walking fast and brushing the tears from his face with the back of his hand.

That was the way.

He'd take her back now. When she went to bed with him she'd be thinking of what she'd done, and she'd be thinking about where I was and that she had put me there. She'd think I had lied to keep her out of jail. When those things started to work on her she'd tear wide open and this time she'd be alone. There wouldn't be anybody else to rip. She'd be all alone. I wondered how long she'd last.

When Harrigan came back in I said, "Get a stenographer. This is the works and you're only getting it once."

That took a little time but finally they got one and Morowitz and Slade and a few other coppers were there as witnesses.

I had to keep Alice in the clear. The cops weren't going to get her. Frank was going to get her. But he wouldn't have her very long.

I started talking and it wasn't easy keeping her in the clear. Harrigan knew I was lying and he swore at me and threatened to beat me silly, but I told him he was going to take it my way or there wouldn't be any confession at all, and finally he shut up and let me get it down the way I wanted.

I got through about ten o'clock and the way it read I'd done everything. Alice was in the clear.

There wasn't anything in it about the blonde. She was just a dumb kid that nobody remembered, and she was dead because she had loved something rotten.

Maybe that was why I was going to die, too.

CHAPTER XVII

THIS is the night. There's a lot of noise from the other guys along the block. Some of them are moaning and beating tin cups against the bars.

They didn't waste any time after they got the confession. The judge gave me the chair about three seconds after my lawyer stopped talking. He spent about ten minutes telling me what a rat I was and he did a swell job of it because this is an election year and I guess he wanted the papers to get the story.

That was six weeks ago.

There's a pretty nice guy here named Father Riley and he's been in to talk to me every couple days. He brings in

papers and cigarettes and one day he told me if I said I was sorry and meant it that everything would be all right.

I can't say that, because it's not the way I feel. Everything I did was wrong, but if I had the chance it would probably go the same way again.

The paper he brought me tonight has a story about Alice. She's not on the front page. There's another murder on the front page, and she's over on page nineteen, beside an ad for women's corsets.

The story tells how she got up this morning and went into the bathroom with her husband's gun and shot herself under the heart. There's a little in the story about Lesser and Frank and me, but it's a pretty short story.

She lasted longer than I thought. In a little while I'll take that same trip.

There was something wrong with us that made us end this way. We were twisted and warped and we couldn't fit anywhere unless we were together.

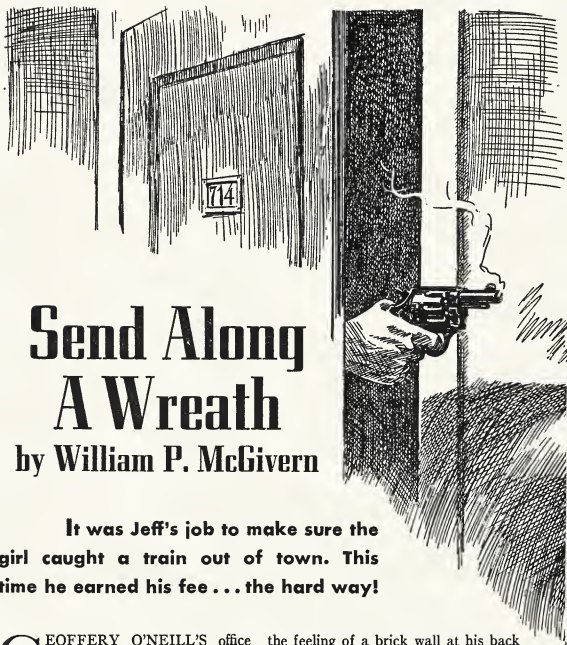
Maybe if I'd stayed on the street I was raised on, where the kids played ball in the summer and the fireman came around in the afternoon to give us a splashing, it would have been different. Maybe if I'd married one of the girls I met at the parish dances, this wouldn't have happened.

Nobody knows about things like that, but my guess is that we'd have still been in trouble, but just in a different place with different people.

We're the same wrong kind of people, but if we could have been together, maybe it would have worked out.

Father Riley has told me about saying I'm sorry, and he's told me a lot about Heaven, but I can't get interested in what he tells me, because I know she won't be there.

The noise from the other cells is louder now, so I guess the guards are on their way.



Send Along A Wreath

by William P. McGivern

It was Jeff's job to make sure the girl caught a train out of town. This time he earned his fee . . . the hard way!

GEOFFERY O'NEILL'S office was a small two-room affair on the tenth floor of a business building in Chicago's Loop. The uncarpeted reception room contained a leather sofa, a desk and telephone and several chairs. O'Neill's inner sanctum contained a desk, a comfortable reclining chair and two filing cabinets. The window faced the brick wall of the adjoining building—one of the reasons O'Neill had chosen the office. He liked

the feeling of a brick wall at his back when he working at his desk.

The green-shaded desk lamp was on now, throwing a huge shadow against the venetian blinds and high-lighting the planes of his square, rugged face. A cigarette burned in an ashtray on the desk, its smoke curling in a blue spiral to the ceiling.

He was working through a pile of dusty papers and yellowed correspondence—the accrued residue of six years

He was four steps past that door when it opened just fer enough to permit the gun to put three bullets into his broad back



as an unofficial investigator for the State's Attorney. The papers and letters, which he had removed from the steel filing cabinets, were in reference to cases he had handled, and some of them still contained enough dynamite to blow sections of the city wide open.

Letters of that type he burned in the metal waste basket at the side of his chair.

He was smiling as he re-read a letter of fervent appreciation from a United States senator. The man had gotten into a mess over a few careless letters he had written. O'Neill had recovered the letters for him and that had been that. But in his letter of almost pathetic gratitude the senator had created another instrument which, in the wrong hands, could be just as damaging as the original letters which O'Neill had recovered.

O'Neill touched a match to the corner of the yellowed letter and dropped it into the waste basket.

He was picking up another batch of correspondence when there was a discreet tap on the door of the outer office. O'Neill glanced up from his work and saw the figure of a woman outlined against the frosted glass door of the outer office.

The knock was repeated.

With an irritated shake of his head he walked through the front office and opened the door. The woman who stood in the doorway was tall and blonde. Her face under a black lace veil looked anxious.

"My name is Estelle Moran," she said. "Can I talk to you a minute, Mr. O'Neill?"

O'Neill saw that she was a woman of about thirty, extremely well dressed. She was slenderly built, finely proportioned and her silken legs were stunning.

"What did you want to see me

about?" he asked.

"May I come in?" the woman asked. "I'm in desperate trouble and I need your help."

She spoke quietly but there was a desperate urgency underlying her words. He frowned and glanced at his watch.

"Can't you drop in tomorrow?" he asked. "I'm pretty busy . . ."

"Tomorrow will be too late," the women said, and O'Neill saw that her black-gloved hands were twisted together tightly. "Please let me talk to you for a moment now."

O'Neill sighed, switched on the light in the outer office and stepped away from the door.

"Come on in," he said.

SHE walked past him into the office and he caught the fragrance of perfume in her wake. He closed the door and pointed to a chair.

"Take a seat," he said.

He lit a cigarette and sat down on the arm of the leather sofa.

"Now what's on your mind?" he asked.

"My life is in danger," the woman said quietly. She lifted the veil from her face as she spoke and O'Neill knew from the expression about her eyes that she wasn't indulging in melodramatics. The muscles in her neck were taut and beneath her make-up her skin was deathly pale. She was close to hysteria from pure terror.

"You mean someone intends to kill you?" O'Neill asked.

"Yes," the woman said.

"What makes you so sure? Has someone tried?"

"Not yet," the woman said. "But as surely as I sit here I won't be alive tomorrow unless you help me. I have money, lots of it. And I have a reservation on tomorrow's Chief for California.

Here's my proposition; if you put me on that train tomorrow and stay with me until it pulls out of the station, I'll pay you one thousand dollars."

O'Neill looked at the woman closely. She wasn't kidding. He ran one of his big hands slowly through his unruly, reddish-brown hair and then stared deliberately at the tip of his cigarette.

"That's a pretty stiff price for a bodyguard," he said. "I could name you a dozen good ones who'd do the job for fifty bucks. Why do you want me?"

"You were a friend of Bernie Arhoff's, weren't you?" the woman asked.

O'Neill nodded slowly, wondering just what was behind the woman's question. Bernie Arhoff was a smart young man who had made a fortune outside the law. He was in Leavenworth now serving a twenty-year term, but the full details of his racket had never been learned. Arhoff hadn't talked. He had taken his rap without incriminating his partners. The G-men had caught him on a income tax charge, but the bulk of his money, reputed to be in the hundreds of thousands, had never been found. Strictly speaking, he wasn't a friend of O'Neill's, but they had gone to school together on Chicago's West Side and O'Neill had always admired him for taking his rap without ratting.

"I haven't seen Bernie in quite a while," he said. "Why did you mention him?"

"I'm a friend of Bernie's," the woman said. "Considerably more than a friend, if you want to put it that way. He told me you could be trusted. I need someone I can trust, Mr. O'Neill."

"You're Ahoff's girl then," O'Neill said. "I think I remember you. Didn't you handle his dice girls when he was in the night club business?"

The woman nodded, and O'Neill saw a film of bitterness cloud her eyes.

"We were legitimate then," she said. She smiled and shrugged wearily. But Bernie was ambitious. He said anyone could run a gin joint but it took brains to make real money."

"WELL, it's water under the dam," O'Neill said. "He probably knows otherwise now. Some people have to learn everything the hard way though." He put his cigarette out in an ashtray on the arm of the sofa. "Let's get back to the point. You want to be on the Chief tomorrow morning when it pulls out for the coast. Why don't you ask the police for an escort?"

"I can't," the woman said miserably. "If you don't help me I'll be in the morgue when that train leaves Chicago. Please help me, Mr. O'Neill."

O'Neill sighed wearily and glanced in at the pile of work on his desk. A few hours wouldn't make too much difference . . .

"All right," he said. "I'll do what I can."

The woman came to his side with quick steps and dropped to her knees. There were tears in her eyes.

"Thank you," she said, in a low tense voice.

O'Neill fidgeted in embarrassment.

"Come on," he said, "this isn't Camille."

He stood up and helped her to her feet. She dug into her purse and handed him a flat packet of bills. They were fifties, he saw. He counted the money carefully and then handed it back.

"Keep it," he said wryly. "I'm not in the hold up business. That's a thousand dollars you're tossing around."

"But I want you to have it," the woman said quickly.

O'Neill shook his head. "I won't

need it where I'm going."

"But—"

"Wait a minute." He grinned and took one fifty dollar bill from the packet. "I changed my mind. This'll do for expenses." He put the stiff new bill in his pocket and then looked around for his hat.

"Are you all packed?" he asked. And when the woman nodded he said, "Where are your grips?"

"At my hotel."

"Okay, let's go."

The woman smiled for the first time since she had entered the office. A nervous, worried smile.

"Maybe I'll make it after all," she said.

"You'll be on the Chief when it leaves tomorrow morning," O'Neill said. "That's a promise."

CHAPTER II

THE girl's hotel was the Metropolitan, about a half dozen blocks from O'Neill's office. They drove there in a cab.

The girl got her key from the desk and they rode up to her room, which was on the eleventh floor. They were alone in the car.

The elevator operator, a fresh faced young kid, in a neat blue and gold uniform with a discharge button on the lapel glanced down at the girl's black, ankle-strap sandals and let his gaze wander slowly up to her blonde hair. His eyes stopped there briefly, then went on innocently to the ceiling. He began to whistle soundlessly.

The car came to a soft stop at eleven, the doors opened silently.

The elevator boy grinned at O'Neill, a we're-a-couple-of-men-of-the-world grin.

O'Neill said, "Control your imagination. I'm going to help her put down

a rug."

He followed the girl down a quiet carpeted hallway to room 1124. The girl opened the door with her key, went in and snapped on the light. 1124 was a suite, with a small living room, a bedroom and bath.

"Mind if I look around?" O'Neill asked.

"Please go ahead. I'll fix a drink. Do you like it with or without?"

"Without," O'Neill said. "And a little of the with on the side."

He took off his hat and walked into the bedroom. There were two windows, opening on a fire escape. There were tan curtains, wooly looking drapes. Both windows were locked. The vanity was three-mirrored and on its top were several bottles of perfume, a nail kit in a leather case with the initials E. M. stamped on it in gold, a jar of cold cream and a long silver compact.

He looked at himself in the mirror, caught a glimpse of his profile and decided he didn't like it. He smoothed his hair down and went into the bathroom.

There was a shower there, inclosed in a glass closet, a small radiator that wasn't turned on, and no window. A pair of nylon stockings hung on a rack behind the door.

He went back to the living room. It was carpeted in gray and the furniture had the smooth, unused look of most hotel furniture. There were two windows from which he got a good look at the Loop. They were also locked.

He took off his coat, tossed it on a chair.

"Sit over here," Estelle Moran said.

She was sitting on a small sofa before the fireplace. The sofa was covered with something that looked stiff and there was no fire. She had poured two drinks and set them on a shiny coffee table in front of the sofa.

O'Neill sat down beside her and twisted sideways enough to look at her. It was worth the effort. She had taken off the hat and veil. Her face was oval but the way her hair swept back from her temples gave it a pointed, interesting look. The hair was dramatic and while the blonde luster was phony, it was the kind of phoniness that took about eight hours of somebody's time to create. It swept back in a kind of winged effect from her temples and then curled into a thick long pageboy. Her eyes were light blue with startlingly clear irises. The purple shadows under them, O'Neill decided, was half make-up and half worry. Or something else.

She had crossed her beautiful legs in a way that displayed them to the best advantage. And the slight twist of her body did a lot of interesting things to her hips and waist and breasts. O'Neill wondered if the room was getting a little warmer. He looked at her again and decided it wasn't the room.

She was looking at him, her crimson mouth parted a little.

"Bernie told me about you," she said, "but he didn't mention those shoulders."

"Yous are nice too," O'Neill said. "But let's leave sex out of this. Who do you think is trying to kill you?"

"It doesn't seem important now that you're here," she said. "I don't mean just that. I mean I feel safe. I know you'll take care of me."

SHE picked up one of the drinks, a stiff one, and handed it to O'Neill. Their finger touched briefly. It might have been accidentally.

O'Neill drank his drink. It tasted almost as good as the liquor ads claimed. Strong, smooth and smoky. The girl took the glass, refilled it and handed it back.

"You're not drinking," he said.

She picked up her drink, smiled slowly. "Now I am."

"Then let's talk," O'Neill said. "You like my shoulders, I like your liquor. We're doing fine. Let's try again. Who's trying to kill you?"

The girl sipped her drink, then made a despairing little gesture with her hand. There was a frightened, tense look in back of her clear eyes.

"I'm not sure," she said. "They tried twice. Once in New York, and then when I started here they tried again. A car tailed my cab in New York one night for almost a mile. I told the driver to lose him but he couldn't. This was about two in the morning. We were on Riverside Drive, at about a hundred and seventeenth street when they pulled alongside. There were three men in the car, it was a black Packard. They swerved into us and the driver had to pull aside to avoid a collision. We crashed into a fire plug and tipped over. The Packard kept going."

"Were you hurt?" O'Neill asked.

"No, I was lucky, I guess."

"What happened the next time?"

The girl reached for O'Neill's glass. He was mildly surprised to find it empty. She filled it, handed it back, then took a sip from her own.

"The next time was in Pittsburgh. I left New York for the Coast, but I thought a man was following me on the train. At Pittsburgh I got off. It was about two in the morning. I don't think anyone saw me. But that morning about six someone tried to get into my hotel room. I heard someone at the door, trying the knob. I got up and turned the lights on. I hadn't double-locked the door, but I did then. I snapped the second lock on and then stood at the door listening. A few minutes later I heard someone walk away

from the door. I waited about five minutes, then I opened the door. The corridor was empty."

"Did you talk to the elevator men?" O'Neill asked.

"Yes. One of them remembered bringing a man up to my floor around five thirty or a quarter to six. He described him to me, but it didn't sound like anyone I ever knew."

"Who has any reason to want you dead?" O'Neill asked.

"I don't know," the girl said. "Unless—" She stopped and looked at the glass in her hand. "How much do you know about Bernie, Mr. O'Neill?"

"Bernie Arhoff? Just the usual talk. That he's got a stack of cash salted away somewhere. That he took the rap and didn't drag anybody else into trouble. Why?"

"That's about all there is to know. Naturally there are a lot of people interested in the money. One of them is Eddie Shapiro, Bernie's partner. Do you know him?"

O'Neill said, "Just barely. I've met him, talked to him a few times, but I wouldn't say I know him. Why? Do you think he's trying to kill you?"

"Yes, I do," the girl said. She said it quietly, without any particular emphasis.

"Why?" O'Neill asked.

"I don't know. But I'm sure of it."

O'Neill tried to recall what he knew of Eddie Shapiro. Shapiro was a small dark man with a passion for gaudy clothes and a scarred face. He was reputed to be smart, hard and dangerous. He had been Arhoff's partner for several years and it was generally understood that if Arhoff had talked Shapiro would have taken a trip also. But Arhoff hadn't talked and Shapiro was still in business. And still smart, hard and dangerous. That was all O'Neill knew about him.

"Shapiro," he said, "isn't going to kill you without a pretty good reason. He's not dumb enough to commit murder unless there's money in it for him."

"That's just it," the girl said. "I know where Bernie's money is. I'm the only one who does."

O'Neill found himself getting annoyed.

"LOOK," he said, "I agreed to put you on the Chief tomorrow morning and I'll do it. But I'm not getting mixed up in the rest of this deal. Arhoff's money has probably all been claimed by the Treasury Department. It's illegal, hot merchandise and it probably won't ever do anybody any good. But I don't give a damn about that. I'm not working for the Treasury Department so it's none of my business. I'll put you on the Chief but that's all I'll do." He stood up, set his glass on the coffee table. "Anyway Shapiro won't kill you if you're the only one who knows where the money is. If he kills you he'll never find it."

She stood up then and she was very close to him. Her eyes looked enormous and frightened. "Please don't talk about him killing me," she whispered. She put her hands on his shoulders and came a little closer to him. "I just can't stand the thought of that."

"You'll be all right," O'Neil said. He wished he hadn't had the third drink. He wished he hadn't had any drink. The room was close and warm and he had trouble getting his thoughts on anything but the girl's nearness.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"You'll be all right," O'Neill said again. "Don't worry. I've got some work to do."

"Please don't leave me alone," she said.

"You won't be," he said. "I know the house detective here pretty well. He'll

stay in the hall until I get back."

The girl's hands moved around to the back of his neck and her slender body pressed close to him. "Why can't you stay here with me?" she said.

O'Neill pulled her hands away from his shoulders.

"You paid me fifty bucks," he said. "It's all I want. I don't need a bonus."

She turned away from him, picked up a pack of cigarettes and matches from the coffee table. "Are you angry?" Her voice didn't tell him anything, but when she struck a match he saw two bright patches of color burning in her cheeks.

He grinned and walked to the phone. "No, I'm not," he said. "But you are." "No woman likes that kind of brush-off," she said. "What is it? Scruples or discrimination?"

O'Neill called the room clerk and asked him to send up the house detective. The room clerk said, "yes, sir," in a discreetly alarmed voice and O'Neill hung up. The girl was standing before the fireplace, taking nervous drags on her cigarette.

He said, "the house detective is on his way up. You haven't anything to worry about. He'll stay until I get back."

"Fine," the girl said. "We can read the book section together. Or is chess your game?"

O'Neill grinned at her. "It wasn't a question of discrimination. That's what you want me to say. Does it make you happy?"

The girl smiled then, carelessly.

"I guess it really doesn't matter. I'm sorry if I sounded bitchy. But women like to think that every man they meet it simply dying to go to bed with them. And when they meet one who doesn't it hurts pretty hard."

"I'm probably the one in a million who wouldn't," O'Neill said. "Don't

let it worry you."

"Thanks for that much," the girl said. "Bernie told me you were tough but maybe you're nice too."

There was a knock on the door then, a loud firm knock. It wasn't the way a bell hop would knock.

"That's Sam Spencer, the house detective," O'Neill said. "You can tell by the knock he's expecting to find Arsene Lupin in here going through your jewel case."

He walked over and opened the door. A heavy-set, mild faced man stood in the doorway. He blinked in surprise when he saw O'Neill.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Nothing serious," O'Neill said. "There's no trouble. But I'd like you to do me a favor. Come in."

SAM SPENCER came in, nodded at the girl, then said to O'Neill, "anything I can do I'll be glad to."

"Good," O'Neill said. He knew he could trust Spencer. The house detective was a retired city patrolman, a solid, dependable man who always tried to take care of his friends. And O'Neill was one of his friends. Spencer was married, had two teen-aged kids and a home in the suburbs, where O'Neill had spent a number of pleasant evenings, drinking beer and admiring Spencer's collection of foreign pistols. He was as normal as his job would let him be.

"It's this," O'Neill said. "Miss Moran here is in a little trouble; somebody's been bothering her. I'd like you to keep an eye on her until I get back. I'll just be gone a few hours."

"Sure thing," Sam said. "I'll park right out in the corridor." He nodded again at the girl and smiled. "You won't be bothered, Miss, I'll see to it."

"I'm very much obliged," she said.

"Now that's settled," O'Neill said. He picked up his hat and coat. "Don't

let anyone into the apartment, Sam, unless he gives you his name and Miss Moran says he's okay."

"Sure," Sam said.

O'Neill turned to the girl. "You've got nothing to worry about. I'll be back shortly."

"I hope you're right," she said.

She bent to put out her cigarette and O'Neill saw the tense lines of worry in her face.

"Don't worry," he said, "I'm right."

* * *

Two hours later he was sitting in his office tying up the last of a few loose ends when the phone rang.

It rang shrilly, insistently.

He picked it up, said, "Yes?"

A voice said, "O'Neill? This is Logan."

"What's up, Inspector?"

"I want to talk to you. Can you get down to the Metropolitan in a hurry?"

The Metropolitan . . . the girl's hotel. O'Neill's fist tightened on the phone.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Sam Spencer got shot here about a half hour ago." The Inspector's voice was urgent. "I heard you talked to him just before it happened. Thought you might know something."

"I'll be right down," O'Neill said. "Do you know who did it?"

"No. We got a girl here, Estelle Moran her name is, saw the whole thing. But the guy made a clean break."

"I'll be right down," O'Neill said, and hung up.

CHAPTER III

THERE was a crowd in the hallway outside Estelle Moran's apartment. O'Neill saw men from the coroner's office, the city papers and Central station.

Inspector Logan was standing in the open doorway of the apartment talking

to two reporters. He left them and walked to meet O'Neill.

"Glad you got here," he said. "Let's go inside where we can talk."

He elbowed his way through the crowd, O'Neill following. They closed the door of Estelle Moran's apartment and went into the living room. There was no one there but a self conscious looking detective, wearing a limp gray hat and staring thoughtfully at the floor.

"Where's the girl?" O'Neill said.

"In the bed room," Logan answered. "There's a matron in there with her. She's okay. Just pretty shocked." He nodded to the detective and said, "wait outside, Jensen."

The detective said, "Okay," and went out.

"Now what do you know O'Neill?" Logan said. "I know you do a lot of work for the D.A. that nobody's supposed to ask any questions about. But I got to know you know about this deal."

He looked at O'Neill squarely and there was an uncompromising, stubborn set to his jaw.

"Relax," O'Neill said. "I just asked him to come up here and keep an eye on Miss Moran while I was gone. That's all there is to it."

"Why did she need a house detective to look after her?" Logan asked.

"Because," O'Neill said, "I wasn't here."

Logan took a deep, exasperated breath and said, "All right then. Why does she need you to look after her?"

"Let me talk to her first," O'Neill said. "I'm giving you a square deal on this, Logan."

"All right," Logan said. "Go in and talk to her. She won't tell us anything. Said she wouldn't talk until you got here. So you can have a nice clubby reunion with her, but I'm going to sit

in on it."

"Come on, then," O'Neill said. He glanced around the room, thinking of his last words with Spencer. "Where's the body?" he asked.

"They took it downtown," Logan said.

O'Neill nodded. He was thinking of nights he had spent in Spencer's home, talking with his wife and his two teen-aged kids. And then drinking beer and looking at Spencer's guns. Spencer had been just a normal guy. And now he was dead. The whole thing made him mad. And a little bit sick.

With Logan tagging at his heels he walked into the bedroom. Estelle Moran was lying on the bed, the pink coverlet pulled up to her chin. Her eyes were closed and the shadows under them were deep and purple. She looked small and tired.

There was a police matron standing beside the bed, a heavy solid woman in black flat-heeled shoes with a tired face.

"You can wait outside Miss Meyers," Logan said.

The girl opened her eyes at the sound of his voice. She looked at O'Neill and began to cry.

He sat down on the edge of the bed, took her hand.

"You've got to talk now," he said. "Take your time, but tell us everything."

"I can't talk about it," she whispered.

"You've got to," O'Neill said quietly. "Did you see who did it?"

She nodded wordlessly and looked away from him. He put a hand under her chin, pulled her head around until her eyes met his again.

"You've got to tell us everything you heard and saw," he said. "It's the only way we can help you. And find the guy who killed Spencer."

SHE started to cry again, but she started talking, the words coming through the sobs, with a choked sound.

"It was about a half hour after you left. I heard someone talking outside the door. I recognized Spencer's voice, but the other man was speaking so low I couldn't be sure if the voice was familiar. I was too scared to open the door. Then Spencer's voice got louder and he seemed angry. Then they seemed to be struggling and Spencer started to shout. I started for the phone but before I got there I heard a shot. I ran back to the door and I heard someone running. I opened the door and there was a man just turning the corner of the stairs. He looked back and saw me, but he didn't stop, just disappeared around the corner." Her eyes moved away from O'Neill's. She had stopped crying but her breathing was uneven. "Mr. Spencer was lying just in front of the doorway. There was blood everywhere."

"All right," O'Neill said, "never mind that. What about this man? Did you recognize him?"

She turned her head away and said, "yes," in a voice so low he had to lean forward to catch it.

"Who was it?"

"Eddie Shapiro," she said.

O'Neill felt Logan shift his weight from one foot to the other.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"I saw him," she said. "I couldn't be mistaken."

Logan shifted his weight again. "That's all I want to know, O'Neill. Sorry I acted edgy, but I don't like things like this happening in my back yard."

He went out and O'Neill heard him open the front door. He could hear his voice issuing fast orders. In five minutes O'Neill knew every cop in town would be looking for Eddie Sha-

piro.

"There's something queer about this deal," O'Neill said. He looked down at the girl and tried to think. But looking at her didn't help his thinking. It just made him feel protective. "Shapiro isn't dumb," he went on, "this doesn't sound like his work. He's putting himself in a hell of a spot and getting nothing out of it. That isn't the way he works."

The girl turned her face away from him and closed her eyes.

"I can't think," she said. "All I can see is the house detective lying on the floor. He looked so pathetic there. Like he was just tired instead of being dead."

"Forget that," O'Neill said, looking at her sharply.

Logan came back into the room then, looking pleased.

"This thing is air-tight," he said. "Shapiro was seen in the lobby tonight. A couple of the boys have been downstairs talking to the hotel people and they found two or three guys who remember seeing Shapiro come in. The identification is perfect. With those scars on his face you can't miss him. We should have this case cleared by morning. Then maybe those reporters will lay off my neck. That's as good a reason as any."

He went out again, and O'Neill looked down at the girl. She was watching him with eyes that looked tense and frightened.

"Are you going?" she said.

"What made you think that?"

"You left before."

O'Neill took out his cigarettes. "This time I'm staying. I may not be able to put you on the Chief tomorrow morning. But I'll stick with you until they round up Shapiro. You'll probably be held for the inquest, maybe the trial."

"IT DOESN'T matter," the girl said.

Her voice sounded thin and lifeless. "When they get Shapiro I'll feel all right." She paused and looked at him, then looked away. "Do you want to stay here?"

O'Neill looked at her and decided he hadn't better.

"I'll be outside," he said. "You've got nothing to worry about. Try and get some sleep."

He walked across the room and tried the windows. They were both locked. He pulled the shades down and walked out. Leaving, he checked the windows in the front room just to be sure. There was no way anyone could get in those windows, but he tried them anyway. He went into the corridor, closed the door of her apartment and made sure it was locked.

There were a couple of cleaning women working on the floor. They had already gotten most of the brown stain out of the pale gray rug. The bucket of water in which they had rinsed their rags was a muddy shade of brown. About the shade of vinegar.

O'Neill looked at it without any expression on his face. But he was thinking that Spencer would have been a little apologetic about causing so much trouble for a couple of old women. That thought made him mad and sick all over again.

He took a dollar from his pocket and held it out to one of the women.

"It's good enough," he said. "When it dries you'll never notice it."

"The manager is awful particular," the women said dubiously. She looked critically at the foot-square stain and then at the dollar bill. Her conscience struggled briefly with cupidity. Or just plain indifference. "I guess you're right. It'll be all right," she said finally. She nudged the other woman and said, "Come on, let's go. It's all right."

O'Neill watched them waddle down the corridor, looking like gray shapeless creatures from another world.

He lit a cigarette and leaned against the wall. His eyes were on the dark stain at his feet. He put out one foot absent-mindedly and pressed the damp spot, feeling it squish slightly under his shoe.

His thoughts were troubled. Sam wasn't the hottest or toughest guy in the city, but he had been an experienced copper, and the way he was killed was the way it would happen to some green punk. O'Neill felt vaguely that he should apologize for Sam's letting it happen to him, but he couldn't imagine who he'd apologize to. He hadn't been taken by surprise, he'd seen Shapiro coming, had even argued with him, and it didn't seem right that he'd be stupid enough to let Shapiro get a gun out and shoot him. But that's what had happened. And it wasn't right.

He lit another cigarette and shoved his hat off his forehead. He wasn't happy about putting in a night guarding the girl's room but after what had happened he couldn't take any more chances. He wished he'd never seen the girl. And he knew he was lying to himself when he thought that. He wanted to see more of her and he didn't know why. Unless it was just because she set him on fire every time he looked at her.

Time passed slowly. He finished his pack of cigarettes, crumpled it and tossed in a sand-filled vase beside the door. His mouth felt stale and parched and he knew he was smoking too much, but his hands went mechanically through the pockets of his clothes, looking for a stray cigarette. He didn't find any.

He looked at his watch. It was a quarter of twelve. The hotel was quiet,

and the corridor looked so deserted that it was hard for him to imagine that it could look otherwise.

He looked at his watch steadily for a minute or so to make sure the hands were moving. They were. He yawned and pulled his hat down over his eyes.

His hand was still on the brim when the scream sounded.

It wasn't a loud scream. It was a scream that sounded like a hand had cut it off before it could get loud.

And it came from the girl's room.

O'Neill wheeled, grabbed the door-knob. The door was locked. He didn't waste time knocking. He slammed his shoulder into the door twice. The second time the jam splintered.

O'NEILL went into the room, half-crouched. There was no light in the apartment, no sound of any kind. He headed for the bedroom, moving quickly.

He felt a draft of cold air on his face at the door. And he saw vaguely the billowing shape of the curtains as the night wind whipped them.

The bedroom window had been opened. And there was just enough light in the room to let him see that the bed was empty.

He cursed and reached for the light switch, but before his hand found it, he heard, or rather sensed, a soft movement behind him.

That was his last conscious thought. There wasn't time to do anything about it. He heard the movement behind him, and the next instant, so soon that the two seemed simultaneous, something hard and heavy crashed into the back of his skull.

He went down heavily, fighting hard to hang onto the shreds of dimming consciousness. But they slipped from his grasp and left nothing but an immense searing pain that finally dis-

solved into blackness.

CHAPTER IV

HE CAME around slowly. There were voices coming through the fog and he could feel light against his eyes. A voice said, "He's coming to," and another voice said, "Lucky he didn't get his head busted wide open."

He opened his eyes then and saw Logan and two uniformed policemen looking down at him. He was lying on his back. The back of his head felt like an abscessed tooth. He tried to sit up but Logan put a hand on his chest and pushed him back gently.

"Stay where you are," he said. "That wasn't catsup that leaked out of your head. You got to rest."

"So I'll rest," O'Neill said.

He looked around, saw that he was in the girl's bedroom, and then he remembered everything.

"The girl's gone," he said. "She started to yell. I barged in and somebody batted me silly. What time is it?"

"A quarter of two," Logan said. "We got here about twelve, found you lying on the floor. Do you remember anything else that will help?"

O'Neill tried. "The room was dark when I came in. The bed was empty though, I know that." He frowned and wished his head would stop aching. He put his hand where it was worst and was surprised to feel a bandage like a turban around his head. "The window was open," he went on. "I saw the curtains blowing."

"Yeah," Logan said. "Somebody's put a foot through it. It opens on the fire escape. A guy could have come from another room down to here and broken in. But it don't sound right. Too complicated."

"Have you got Shapiro yet?" O'Neill asked.

Logan shook his head. "But we will. We're going over the whole town. We'll find him. But without the girl we haven't even got enough to arrest him on." He lit a cigarette bitterly. "Ain't this hot? I get an air-tight case and they steal my only witness right out of hotel room."

"While O'Neill, the peerless investigator of the D.A.'s office gives an imitation of not-too-bright moron? That's the rest of it, isn't it?"

"I'm not blaming you," Logan said. "Anybody can get knocked over the head."

"Sure," O'Neill said. "But not everyone does it as prettily as I do."

"The Doc said you should go home," Logan said, looking embarrassed. "He said you need rest. You sound like you could use a lot."

O'Neill swung his legs off the bed and set up. He didn't care whether his head rolled off his shoulders or not. What did he need a head for anyway?

He looked around, found his coat, put it on, then perched his hat tenderly on top of his bandaged head. "The perfect sleuth," he said. "Witty and fearless to the end." He waved at Logan and the two coppers and went out.

He went downstairs and got a double Alka-Seltzer from the drug store fountain, then dug a nickel out of his pocket and went into the phone booth.

He dialed a number that rang about a dozen times before the receiver was lifted.

"Benny," O'Neill said.

There was a short silence, then a husky voice said, "wrong number, Buddy."

"Cut the clown act. This is O'Neill, Benny."

After another silence, the voice said, "I can't help you. I don't know anything about it."

"Listen, Benny and listen damn carefully," O'Neill said. His voice was hard and low. "I want a line on Shapiro. And I want it quick."

"Are you crazy?" Benny said. "Or don't you read the papers? So does every cop in town. He's too hot to even talk about."

"You're going to talk," O'Neill said. "I'm in a bad mood. Somebody played me for a sucker and damn near split my head open. I don't feel good. I don't want any more double talk."

"You ain't got a heart, O'Neill. Coppers been buzzing around here all day and I didn't make a peep. Maybe they got the phone tapped now. What'll happen to me if I talk to you? And I ain't got no information anyway. Just because I'm in the same business with a guy don't mean I sleep with him. I haven't seen him in a week."

"This phone is okay," O'Neill said. "There's nobody else on it. And you know you can talk to me. I'll take care of you if there's any trouble. Now give me a line on Shapiro."

"Okay," Benny said. His voice was doleful. "He's been chasing a broad for the last few months. She lives at the Fairmont hotel on Wilson avenue. He's kept her quiet, so his wife won't start asking for more alimony. She might know something."

"What's her name," O'Neill said.

"Billie LaRue."

"Thanks," O'Neill said.

"O'Neill," Benny said. "Do me a favor? Forget my telephone number. Pretend we don't know each other. I don't want to get mixed up in this thing. Let them hang Shapiro and get it over with. Why should they bother his friends about it?"

O'Neill grinned at the receiver without much humor and dropped it back in place. He went outside the hotel and nailed a cab. He gave the driver

the address of the Fairmont hotel and told him to hurry.

THE Fairmont was a six story, brownstone building, with the name on a shiny black plate beside the entrance. A green canopy supported by shiny metal rods extended from the curb to the doorway. O'Neill paid the cab driver and went inside.

There was too much furniture in the small lobby, too many shiny metal ashtrays, too much perfume in the air. The place looked cheap and dirty, and the gilt tables and tricky lamps made it look worse. Like a prostitute with too much make-up on.

The pale young man behind the desk looked bored. He had on a gray pin-stripe suit and he managed to create the impression that working in a hotel wasn't his regular line. He pointedly ignored O'Neill's bandaged head.

"I want to talk to Billie La Rue," O'Neill said.

The young man looked at his fingernails.

"Is she expecting you?"

"No. What's her room number?"

"I'm sorry, but—"

"You'll be a lot sorrier in a minute," O'Neill said. He knew he was acting like some screen-writer's idea of a detective. But he didn't care. He was getting madder all the time. At himself and at everybody.

"Well," the room clerk said, looking uncertain, "I—"

"It's all right," O'Neill said. He was too tired to keep up the tough act. "I'm from the D.A.'s office." He took out his wallet and showed his card.

"Of course then it's all right," the young man said. He nodded mysteriously and said, "it's room three thirty. Anything I can do to help, Mr. O'Neill?"

O'Neill was about to tell him what he could do, but he decided against it. "No thanks. Sorry I sounded off. I've been seeing too many movies, I guess."

He took the elevator to the third floor, walked about twenty yards along a carpeted corridor and knocked at the door marked three-thirty.

He heard light footsteps in the room, then a voice asked, "Who is it?"

"State's Attorney's office," he said. "I have to talk to you Miss La Rue."

"Oh—" There was a pause, then the voice said, "just a minute."

The footsteps went away from the door, came back quickly. The door opened.

O'Neill knew about what to expect. The name Billy La Rue, the Fairmont hotel and Eddie Shapiro all added up to a certain kind of girl. A girl with too much lipstick and phoney hair, white, shaved legs, and a mental outlook like a cash register. That was what he expected.

But the girl in the doorway was nothing like that. She was small, neatly built, with clear eyes and soft, natural looking hair. She didn't have any make-up on and she looked worried and scared. She was the kind of fresh, wholesome girl you'd see on a college campus in the Middle West.

O'Neill took off his hat. She was that kind of a girl.

"May I come in?" he said.

"Of course," she said, and led him to a small living room that managed to look neat and clean, despite the furniture. There were fresh flowers on a table and several nice pictures on the wall that he knew didn't come with the room.

"Sit down, please," she said.

O'Neill took a seat and lit a cigarette. The girl sat down facing him in a straight backed chair. She was wearing a blue wool house coat and blue slip-

pers. She looked so clean and young that O'Neill felt embarrassed.

Finally he said, "You know about Shapiro?" He made it more of a statement than a question.

The girl nodded. "I heard it on the radio. But I don't think it's true. I don't think he killed that detective in the hotel. How did you find out I knew him?"

Her directness and poise slightly confused O'Neill.

"Let's go a little slower," he said. "When did you see him last?"

"Tonight," the girl said. "He was here about nine o'clock. He stayed about fifteen minutes, then left."

"You haven't heard from him since?"

"No. I just heard the late news saying he was wanted by the police for killing a house detective at the Metropolitan Hotel."

"What's the set-up between you and Shapiro?" O'Neill asked. "How did you get mixed up with him?"

THE girl looked down at her hands and O'Neill thought she was going to cry. But she didn't.

"He's been kind to me," she said. "I know you think he's a murderer but I know better. Eddie isn't really bad. He's never had a break in his life that he didn't make for himself. His family threw him into the streets, he never had a chance to go to school, but he still has a better idea of right and wrong than most people. That's why I know you're wrong if you think he shot that man tonight."

"Well," O'Neill said, "let that ride for a while. How did you happen to meet him?"

"My name isn't Billie La Rue, it's Betty Nelson," the girl said. "I came from a small town in Michigan. I've only been in Chicago about three months. I want to dance and the agent

who's helping me suggested I try another name. I met Eddie one night in a restaurant. He's been wonderful to me always. And he's never tried to touch me, which is a lot more than I can say for some pious young men I've met."

O'Neill smiled. "Watch the pious ones," he said. He liked this girl, he wanted to help her, but he had a hunch she'd stick by Shapiro despite anything he might say. But he had to try. "Now look," he said. "Shapiro is in a bad spot now. He might get out all right, but don't do anything foolish. If he comes here don't let him in, don't even see him."

The girl smiled faintly. "Do you really think I'd turn him down now that he needs someone?"

"I guess you wouldn't," O'Neill said. He got up, put out his cigarette. "Can I use your phone?"

The girl showed him where it was and he called Police Headquarters and asked for Logan. He got him after a short wait.

"This is O'Neill," he said. "What's new?"

"I thought you were supposed to be in bed," Logan said. "The only thing new is we got Shapiro."

"Where is he now?" O'Neill said. He looked up and saw the girl watching him with anxious eyes. One of her hands moved to her throat, stayed there a moment then fell slowly back to her side.

"He's right where we found him," Logan's voice was saying. "He ain't going anywhere. He's dead." His voice sounded tinny and harsh in O'Neill's ears.

"Who did it?" he asked.

"Looks like suicide, but we aren't sure yet. Have to wait for the lab tests."

"Any line on the girl?"

"No. She's probably in the river by this time. I figure—"

"Oh, to hell with your deductions," O'Neill said wearily. "Just give me the facts."

He listened while Logan told him the story. When he finished O'Neill said, "I'm going back to the girl's room at the Metropolitan and look around. If anything more breaks give me a ring, will you?"

He hung up and began fumbling for another cigarette. The girl took a step toward him, then stopped. "They got Eddie," she said, making a flat statement of it.

"YEAH," O'Neill said. He found the cigarette and lit it. "They found him in a hotel on the South Side. Looks like he shot himself." He put a hand on her shoulder and squeezed lightly. "Don't let this throw you."

The girl was hanging on to her control with a visible effort.

"Would you leave me alone now, please?" she asked.

"Sure," O'Neill said. He started for the door, but the girl called him back. "One thing," she said. "Eddie left a package with me tonight. You'll probably want it so you might as well take it now."

She went into the bedroom and returned carrying a brown leather briefcase.

"Take it," she said.

O'Neill put the briefcase under his arm, nodded good bye to her, and left. Down on the street he got a cab and started back for the Metropolitan. On the way he opened the briefcase.

It was crammed tightly with neat stacks of money. He knew before he counted it that there was two hundred thousand dollars there; and he knew it was the money that had belonged to Bernie Arhoff and Eddie Shapiro.

He did a lot of thinking for the rest of the ride and none of it added up to anything that made sense.

CHAPTER V

THERE was a uniformed copper standing at the door of Estelle Moran's room. He was leaning against the wall half-asleep. Except for him the corridor was deserted. The night lights were on and the place looked dismal.

"Go get yourself a cup of coffee if you want," O'Neill said to the copper. "I'll be up here until you get back."

The copper opened the door for O'Neill and said, "Thanks, a lot, Mr. O'Neill. I always get these graveyard details. It's enough to drive a man batty."

"Get two cups of coffee," O'Neill said. "Hell, make a night of it."

"I'll do that," the copper grinned.

O'Neill snapped on the lights and shut the door. He walked into the living room, looked around. The glasses he and the girl had used were still on the coffee table before the fireplace. He went into the bathroom and had a long drink of cold water. It tasted wonderful. His image in the mirror was pretty awful. He looked pale and the turban-effect of the bandage made him look like a hungry fortune teller.

The bathroom was clean and warm. The nylons were gone from behind the door, but everything else was just the same. He wandered into the bedroom trying to decide what he was looking for.

The drapes still billowing gently and he could feel a breeze on his cheek from the broken window. He pushed them aside and looked out on the fire escape. He could see fragments of broken glass glinting on the metal floor of the fire escape like blinking cats'

eyes.

He glanced down at the carpeting of the room and noticed that it was clean. No glass there. He got down on his knees and made a closer inspection, even ran his hand gently over the soft nap of the carpet. But there wasn't any glass. All of it had fallen on the fire escape.

He took off his hat and started to scratch his head, until he remembered the bandage. He tossed his hat on the bed, threw the brief case beside it and sat down.

The frown on his face put deep lines alongside his nose.

He knew the whole story now. There were just a few little touches he wasn't sure of. But they weren't important. He knew who had killed Sam Spencer, who had sapped him in this same room a few hours before, and who had killed Eddie Shapiro.

He didn't know why yet, but he wasn't worried about that. He'd find that out, too.

The knowledge didn't make him feel any better. He still felt sick and tired.

He got up and started for the phone in the living room, but before he had taken two steps, a sound stopped him. A sound that raised the hairs at the back of his neck.

The sound was that of a key sliding into the lock of the door to the suite!

There didn't seem to be another sound in the world. O'Neill couldn't hear his own heart or his own breathing. Nothing existed except the grating metallic click that sounded when the lock turned and the door began to open.

There was a soft footstep, a long pause, and then the lock clicked again as the door was closed softly.

O'Neill knew who was in the next room. He knew that the person who was moving slowly toward him was the murderer of Sam Spencer and Eddie

Shapiro. And he knew that person had returned here to finish the job.

But he didn't move. He didn't have a gun. He didn't have a chance. So he stood, a few feet from the bed, in the center of the room, waiting. His head was lowered, a little like a fighter who'd taken too much of a beating to know when to quit. His legs were spread, like a man expecting another blow.

She appeared in the doorway. There was a gun in her right hand. She said, "Smart copper," in a voice that was just above a whisper.

"Not so smart," he said.

She wasn't wearing a hat. Her phoney blonde hair was disordered. But it still looked good. It still looked like the kind of phoniness that took eight hours of somebody's time to create. The shadows under her eyes were deep and purple, but her eyes didn't look clear now. They looked muddy and glazed at the same time. Her body and legs were the same, but they didn't look seductive any more. They looked tense and tight, like the muscles were straining against an invisible pressure. The hand that held the gun looked the same way.

"Where is it?" she said. "Where is it, smart copper?" Her voice sounded the way her body looked.

"YOU'RE the smart one," O'Neill said. "The story you gave me was good enough to sell to Hollywood. All the business about having to get on the Chief. All that scared-to-death of Eddie Shapiro. All the big love act. That was really smart. Have you got the rest of it figured out, too? How you'll get out of here if you plug me?"

"Where is it?" she said again. And O'Neill knew she wasn't going to ask again.

"On the bed," he said. "In the briefcase. But is it going to do you any

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good? Are you going to get away with it?"

"I'll get away with it," she said. "Back up."

O'Neill backed up and she crossed quickly to the bed, picked up the briefcase and put it under her arm. "You big virile men," she said, "you're so damn dumb it's pathetic. You think because you can paw women like they were just so many pounds of flesh that they don't have anything to think with."

"How did you kill Spencer?" O'Neill asked.

"How do you think? I opened the door and shot him. The big slob didn't even have time to look surprised."

"Then you made up the story about seeing Shapiro?"

She nodded and started to back to the door. "Smart copper," she said. "A lot of good all this will do you. I pinned it on Shapiro so the cops would start after him. Shapiro had Bernie's money. But he was honest. He was keeping it for Bernie. I knew if he got hot the first thing he'd do would be to go for the money. He did just that. I knew where his hide-out was. It was an old place of Bernie's. So I went there and waited. He showed about thirty minutes later, but he didn't have the money. He told me what he'd done with it so I shot him."

"He gave it to the girl out at the Fairmont, so you went out there," O'Neill said. "And you found out from her that I'd been there so you came back here."

She nodded again and backed up a few more steps.

"I had the pleasure of breaking your head open tonight," she said. "Too bad I didn't kill you then and save myself this trouble."

"I just figured everything out before you got here," O'Neill said. "I felt

pretty dumb. When I saw the nylons were gone from the bathroom and all the glass had fallen out on the fire escape, I knew what had happened. You shot Spencer to put the heat on Shapiro and make him run for the money. Then when I took over the guard duty outside you got up, dressed very carefully, and broke the window from the inside. That's why the glass fell out. Then you let out a little lady-like scream just loud enough for me to hear, but not loud enough to wake up anyone in the adjoining rooms. And when I barged in here you conked me one. Is that about right?"

"Smart copper," she said.

O'Neill didn't know whether it was worth the extra effort to make a try for the gun. He knew he wouldn't make it, but he didn't like the idea of just standing and being plugged.

He didn't have a chance to make up his mind.

The lock of the front door clicked, the hinges creaked.

Estelle Moran wheeled toward the living room. Two shots sounded, sharp and loud, O'Neill leaped forward, grabbed her by the shoulders and reached for the gun. But it slipped from her fingers.

She sagged back against him and began to moan softly. The small sound came through a light froth of blood that was deepening the carmine stain of her lipstick.

HE put his hands under her elbows and lowered her to the floor. She sighed once and opened her eyes. They were clouding fast. She said, "Smart copper," and turned her face away from him. She coughed once or twice and then her body stiffened in his arms. She said, "No, no," and tried to sit up, but she didn't make it. When she slumped back again it was all over.

O'Neill looked up and Betty Nelson was standing in the doorway. Her hands hung at her sides. In one of them was a smoking gun. Her face was empty.

"She killed Eddie," she said. "She didn't give him a chance. She told me he killed himself, but I knew she was lying."

"She was lying," O'Neill said. He was still crouched beside the dead body Estelle Moran. He felt too tired to ever get up.

"I came here after her. I told the desk clerk you'd sent for me and he gave me a key."

O'Neill heard footsteps in the corridor, excited voices.

He got up quickly, took the gun from the girl's hand.

"Don't talk," he said fiercely. He took her by the shoulders, shook her hard. "I *did* send for you! You came here, and she was dead already. I shot her. She pulled a gun on me and I had to shoot her. Don't forget that!"


The copper came into the room then. "Gosh! Mr. O'Neill—"

He stopped and looked at the body on the floor. "What happened?"

"This is the girl Logan was looking for," O'Neill said. "She's wanted for two murder raps. Keep the corridors clear. Send the tenants back into their rooms."

Logan got there ten minutes later. When O'Neill finished his story he was nodding contentedly. "This is the best way all around. No trouble about a trial now." He looked down at the dead girl and shook his head gloomily. "With those legs she'd beat any rap."

ESTELLE MORAN didn't make the eight o'clock Chief that morning. But she was on it the following day. There was an aunt in California who claimed the body, and was willing to



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SEND ALONG A WREATH

(Concluded from page 173)

pay the expenses of burial, so she was shipped out West, not in a drawing room, but in the refrigerator car up close to the engine.

O'Neill went down to the station with Logan to see that she made connections for her final trip.

They waited until the train pulled out, then started back down the ramp.

"Well," O'Neill said, "that's what she hired me for. To put her on the Chief. So everybody should be happy."

He reached into his vest pocket and pulled out the crisp fifty dollar bill she'd given him. He looked at it for a minute and then began tearing it into pieces.

"Are you nuts?" Logan asked.

O'Neill didn't answer. Tearing up the bill made him feel better. But not much.

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THE SHAKESPEAREAN FRAUD

By
JUNE LURIE

RARELY do we find a man with the peculiar makeup and personality of William Ireland. He is known as one of the most notorious of literary forgers. A man of superior intellect and talents, from a wealthy family, there is little reason that can be found for William Ireland's nefarious undertakings. He operated in the eighteenth century in London and caused quite a furor in the literary world. The truth about his forgeries did not come to light until years after his death when his diary and confessions were published.

What prompted the man to commit such deeds? William Ireland offers a partial explanation in his "confessions." It began merely as a game of wits. A beautiful document had fallen into his hands. Old books were a sort of hobby with him, and he had come across a prayer book which had once been presented to Queen Elizabeth. It was ornamented with a wood-cut border; the Queen's coat of arms was stamped in gold upon the elaborately tooled leather cover. Ireland believed that this copy might have been presented to the Queen as a gift from its author, but there was no proof of the presentation. The idea intrigued him. He thought about it and finally decided to manufacture proof.

This was the first in a long series of forgeries. On a piece of paper yellowed with age and with ink which he had weakened with water, Ireland wrote a letter as if from the author to Elizabeth. It requested "her gracious acceptance and countenance of his work." Then proudly he took the book to a friend who happened to be a book-binder by trade. At the shop the forged document was praised for its genuine appearance. Ireland was provided with a mixture which would resemble old ink much better than his dilute solution. Then he rewrote the dedication.

William worked in the law office of his uncle, Samuel Ireland, who had a great many friends prominent in literary circles. Samuel Ireland was justly proud of his collection of old documents and first editions of famous writings. As a sort of joke, his nephew presented him with the prayer-book and the forgery it contained. The older man accepted it with many thanks and considered it authentic. His "expert" friends pronounced it genuine and judged him extremely lucky to have such a document in his possession. William Ireland smirked inwardly at being able to so easily deceive these authors and critics.

The literary world in England at this time was very interested in the writings of Shakespeare found in the bard's original handwriting. A few of these had come to light, and authors as well as publishers were busy compiling new volumes based on the life and personality of the

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great playwright revealed in the latest documents which were found. Samuel Ireland was just as excited as the rest and often spoke to his nephew about his great desire to obtain Shakespeare's signature for his collection.

William Ireland, anxious to please his uncle, and also curious to see just how gullible the so-called experts could be, decided to manufacture another original document. As a lawyer, William came across an old mortgage deed made out during Shakespeare's time with that writer's signature. It was in itself a famous document and had been reproduced widely. Ireland made a tracing of the signature and created a new document using a piece of parchment from the end of an old rent-roll. Imitating the style of penmanship as well as possible he formed a lease between William Shakespeare and John Heminge with Michael Fraser and his wife Elizabeth. The other signatures were copied from more documents. With great pains he affixed an old wax seal which would give the paper an official air and then he presented the specimen to Mr. Samuel Ireland.

HIS uncle could not conceal his great pleasure when he received the deed. All his friends were called in to inspect and admire the paper, and one and all agreed that it was genuine and a stroke of good fortune. The many people who flocked to Mr. Ireland's house to see the document exclaimed that perhaps more writings could be secured from the same source, and they begged William Ireland to tell them where he had unearthed such a prize.

But he managed to withhold that vital information through the weeks that followed. With amazing skill he manufactured paper after paper supposedly from the pen of Shakespeare. William Shakespeare's profession of the Protestant faith was composed in William Ireland's own hand and began in the ancient spelling "I beyne nowe off sounds Mynde do hope thatte thys mye wyshe . . ." translated into modern spelling would read "I being of sound mind do hope that this my wish . . ." The profession continued on for a lengthy paragraph of beautiful prose. When finished it was presented to Samuel Ireland and praised even more than the previous documents. The forger became bolder; documents turned up which included love letters to Anne Hathaway and poetry composed by William Ireland alias William Shakespeare.

Soon the forger invented a story which was intended to explain the source of all these priceless documents. He informed the public that he had met a mysterious gentleman in a coffee house. Explaining to the nameless fellow his great love of literature and original papers, this chance acquaintance stated that he owned a great many papers of doubtful value which had been in his family for many generations. Ireland was invited to come and visit to see the collection. According to Ireland's story, he did so, and it was at

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this stranger's house that one document after another had been unearthed. The fellow had unwittingly promised Ireland that he could have anything from the collection he might want, not thinking that there were Shakespearian documents among the papers. Like a true English gentleman he would not think of going back on his bargain and allowed William Ireland to do as he wished with the papers.

This story was regarded as remarkable, you may be sure, and some questioned it. But Ireland protested that the gentleman was very rich and did not want to be bothered by a curious public. Ireland said that he had given his solemn promise never to reveal the identity of the donor.

Curiously enough, the truth about these forged papers was not discovered until years after William Ireland's death when his "confessions" were published. In them he rightfully sneered at those men who were so eager to believe what he had laid before them. William Ireland was not a forger in the usual sense for he never got a penny for his trouble.

CRIMINALS WITH CORPSES

By LEE KALEY

IRONIC but true is the fact that some of the progress of surgery through the ages was due, in many mysterious ways, to a distinctive type of criminal—the body-snatcher. The harrowing escapades of John Bishop and Thomas Williams in this career provide a colorful and complete description of the ways and ends of such cultists.

The twelve-year long careers of Bishop and Williams first came to light in November, 1831, when they were taken into custody by the London police on suspicion of murdering a fourteen-year-old boy whose body they had offered for sale to King's College. After a coroner's jury was called to view the remains of the young victim, witnesses were summoned to testify against the two defendants.

William Hill, a porter in the dissecting-room of King's College, testified that he had known both men before this inquest, since they had supplied the college with many other subjects for dissection. He added the damaging testimony that the two suspected men offered the body of a fourteen-year-old boy for the sum of twelve guineas. When Hill thought this price too high, he summoned a Mr. Partridge, the anatomical demonstrator, to argue about this price but the two men persisted that this particular corpse was worth the high price since it was most difficult to obtain.

Partridge began to entertain some suspicions when he observed that the body was particularly fresh and after inquiring as to the cause of death, Bishop and Williams angrily refused to divulge exactly how they had obtained the body. To confirm his growing suspicions, Partridge summoned some of his colleagues who also pointed out the strange rigidity of the body which indicated that

the body had not been hurried. They too observed that the left hand was turned toward the head, and the fingers were firmly clenched. More important was their immediate discovery of a cut on the forehead from which blood seemed to have flowed upon the chest.

When the snatchers angrily protested his many insinuations and refused to answer his questions, Partridge immediately summoned the police and delivered the suspects and the body into the custody of special investigators. Partridge, an important King's witness, testified later that it was his opinion that the marks of internal violence which he discovered were serious enough to cause death and that the victim's death was caused by some heavy blow inflicted on the back of the neck.

After another surgeon, Mr. George Beaman, confirmed Partridge's medical testimony, the coroner's jury returned a verdict of "wilful murder" against the accused. The trial was set and the witnesses were lined up for both sides.

The testimony of the many witnesses who appeared traced the movements of the prisoners to a well-known house-of-call for body-snatchers—the Fortune of War public house. Here, the witnesses stated, Bishop and Williams were seen with a number of human teeth wrapped in a handkerchief, to which some of the flesh of the gums still adhered.

THE police and special investigators proceeded to make a thorough search of the prisoners' house and surrounding territory to uncover more evidence. Here they made several horrible discoveries which convinced them, beyond any doubt, that Bishop and Williams were engaged in the traffic of murder and the sale of their victims. They found blood-stained clothes belonging to a small boy and a woman named Frances Pigburn who disappeared and was never seen again. It was believed that the poor woman, searching for lodgings, was lured by the two men to their house and there murdered and her body sold to some dissecting group.

With this horrible evidence against them, the jury was quick in returning a verdict of guilty for Bishop and Williams. This verdict was greeted with a loud roar of applause by the jammed courtroom who listened revengefully to the recorder as he passed the sentence of death.

In the face of this popular hate against them, Bishop and Williams saw no possibility for retrial or a lighter sentence and the two men made detailed confessions of their wilful murders. On December 4, 1831, Bishop finally set his signature to a confession of brutal murder. He related that he and Williams picked up the boy on a street in Smithfield, England, fed the urchin and while the child fell asleep, they bound and gagged him and let him hang headlong into a well of water until death came.

Not long after this confession, Bishop also signed a confession to the murder of Frances Pig-

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burn, whom the two men had lured into their house for warmth and food and drowned her in the same manner as the child. A third confession of murdering a ten-year-old child was also made, although the two condemned men were only suspected and finally convicted of two of the most brutal and callous murders in the history of English crime.

THE TERRIBLE ZAMPANTE

ONE of the most hated scoundrels of the Renaissance in Italy was Zampante. The city of Ferrara was no more corrupt than most Italian cities at that time. Public offices were sold to the highest bidder. That was how Zampante became chief of police. He did not buy that job to satisfy his patriotic emotions; he intended to make it pay, and he did.

With the support of the rulers, the notorious Duke Hercules I and his family, Zampante terrorized the city. Neither life nor property was safe, especially the latter. A rich man could commit any crime on the calendar and buy immunity from arrest, to say nothing of punishment.

If a rich man failed to take advantage of these encouragements and led an honest life, Zampante was likely to be offended with him and have him "framed" for a crime which he ought to have committed. When this type of manipulation of justice seemed too obvious, Zampante convicted the offender and then obtained a pardon for him—at a staggering price.

Unscrupulous and cruel, Zampante often put men to the torture even before they were tried. And the tortures of the Renaissance inspired fear and horrors enough to drive men to madness. Annually this scoundrel was able to collect fortunes by the mere threat of his presence; much of the money he collected went to his lord, the Duke.

In spite of all the money in his possession Zampante was a miserable man. He lived by violence and suffered mentally with the fear of dying from it. Always present was the thought that someone might try to take his life. Zampante took the most elaborate precautions against assassination. He never stepped outside his door until he was completely surrounded by a heavily armed bodyguard. To escape poison he ate no meat except that of pigeons which he raised in his own house.

But a man with as many enemies as Zampante had cultivated could not hope to live very long.

One summer afternoon, while he was enjoying a nap, three students of the university took Justice into their own hands. They entered his house and drove their daggers into his sleeping body. How they managed to get by the bodyguard has never been explained, but it is believed that bribery must have done the work.

The three assassins dashed on horseback through the streets of the city proclaiming their deed, "Zampante is dead! Zampante is dead!" and there was great rejoicing.—A. Morris.

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(OR IS IT?)



BY GROUCHO MARX

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On second thought, you'd better keep on saving, chum. Otherwise you're licked.

For instance, how are you ever going to build



that Little Dream House, without a trunk full of moolah? You think the carpenters are going to work free? Or the plumbers? Or the architects? Not those lads. They've been around. They're no dopes.

And how are you going to send that kid of yours to college, without the folding stuff?

Maybe you think he can work his way through by playing the flute.

If so, you're crazy. (Only three students have ever worked their way through college by playing the flute. And they had to stop eating for four years.)

And how are you going to do that world-traveling you've always wanted to do? Maybe you think you can stoke your way across, or scrub decks. Well, that's no good. I've tried it. It interferes with shipboard romances.

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